

IN A BENGAL BACKWATER

J. HAMILTON

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A BENGAL BACKWATER

BY
JOHN HAMILTON

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FOREWORD BY A FRIEND.

IN John Hamilton's "In a Bengal Backwater" the echoes of the clash of conflict between the East and the West are heard. In other works the reading public have been introduced to descriptions of Anglo-Indian life in its contact with Indian life proper; but in this work an attempt has been made to reproduce with fidelity a phase of Indian life which is of necessity but little known to the European public, namely, the internal economy of Bengali Hindu home life in the mufassal of Bengal. The descriptions of river scenery at different seasons of the year are refreshingly accurate and attractive, while the characters stand out in relief as replicas from life with comparative freedom from exaggeration. The underlying quality however which, in the opinion of one who is deeply interested in the subject and has had many years' experience of Bengal, deserves recognition from the public is the praiseworthy effort made by the writer to understand the Bengali temperament.

IN A BENGAL BACKWATER.

CHAPTER I.

“So you are back in Bengal, back in the old house in which your children were born, back in the big, empty rooms which rang with their voices and echoed with their footsteps.

Your letter, written in the first agonies of sacrifice, brings back memories of like sufferings in that very house. As you know, that house was the scene of my early married life. I, too, have stood in its barren emptiness, desolate and bereaved. You write of your empty arms, your aimless life. All your interest and your work are left behind in England, where the children are bearing their share of the separation, their young lives shadowed and darkened by premature sorrow. Worst of all, you fear that you have made a mistake, that the sacrifice, which is rending your heart, was uncalled for and is worthless. Five years stand between you and your husband. He has filled your place with work and other interests. You are not wanted. You write of the changes all around you. Old friends are gone, you have nothing in common with those who have taken their places. You stand in the desolate verandah,

which once rang with merry voices, and the burden of those five years descends suddenly upon you. And you might have stayed with the children. You have stabbed their hearts, torn from them their child-right of sorrow-free carelessness, put upon them a burden too great for their years. And for what? You write of soul solitude. You come from your carefully ordered house, where the dear old customs of your fathers are observed by your children. You speak of the precious readings, the prayers at your knee, the English Sundays. Now you find yourself in a land of no sabbaths, far from God's altar. Those around you care nothing for these things. You cry out like Elijah 'I, even I, only am left.'

I know, dear, I know. Your religion has formed part of a perfect picture, you have worshipped in a beautiful setting. You have knelt in dim cathedrals, where rich lights have streamed from pictured windows, where memories have whispered from the record-laden walls. Your soul has soared Heavenwards on the organ's pealing chords. Cultured choirs have poured forth petitions, rung out praise, chanted psalm and hymn. Full feasts of eloquence have furnished teaching, comfort or rebuke. Weekly, nay daily, for one hallowed hour, you have left the world to kneel apart, swept into sacramental union with your God. And now, all this is gone. The picture and the peace have vanished, mystery and ecstasy are yours no more. Torn from the

rich setting, you stand alone in a land of no sabbaths, far from church or priest, where worship is forgotten and sacraments unrealized. And your need is so great! You are like a plant, torn from the dim aisles of your Western woods, and thrown upon the burning soil of this Eastern land. You are like a spirit, fresh from the tearing throes of death, disembodied, naked, defenceless. Yet plants re-root, there are throes of birth as well as pangs of death. Take courage, dear heart, for yours are the agonies of a new birth. Have no fear of not being wanted. Your heart, bursting with love, tender with pain, is surely the rich gift of a good God, to a country whose need of love is great indeed. Nay, dear, Nature is no waster. Wait, and you shall serve. Be still, and you shall see the glory of God. Wait, watch, and, above all, pray. As for the lost setting of your prayers, God first walked with man in a garden, and so near was His Presence that man sought to hide from his God. The Saviour of the world revealed Himself in a stable. No mellow lights, no blended colours or pealing chords enriched the rituals of the Magi. The gospel was preached from fishing boats, the five thousand were fed in the wilderness, the scenes of the miracles were dim bazaars and sordid streets. Dry your tears, leave your desolate house, go out into God's garden, seek Him in the old setting, seek and surely you shall find. You have come to a land sorely burdened and perplexed,

pitifully in need of mother love, mother patience, mother wisdom. And you stand amid the sorrow, the problems, the general puzzle of Bengal, mature, taught by pain, wise with sympathy, hopeful by experience, and free. Free to give that which you have, with toil and suffering, received. O woman, greatly beloved, vastly privileged ! Take up the cross and the crown of the women of your race, and bring to this sorely blundering Bengal the light and the freedom of the Gospel of Christ. What ! you cry : you dare not attempt to proselytize ! You are no missionary to push your way through grudging doors ! You cannot meddle in matters so deep ! Did our Saviour strive or cry ? Did Mary meddle or push ? Christianity is a life, not a creed. Would you bring the Kingdom of Heaven to Bengal ? Behold, it is within you ! How are you to describe, to explain it ? Carry your mind back to the first definition of the Kingdom of Heaven. What manner of scenes do you picture to yourself ? A group of Eastern women, babes in their arms, toddlers round their knees, and in their midst, blessing and caressing, the young Jewish carpenter, the wandering teacher, the Son of God. As He holds a child aloft in His arms, His voice rings out with His message, ' Of such is the Kingdom of Heaven.'

Look in memory's mirror, and see the picture of a humble house, a company of lowly, listening folk, gathered round Another, One of themselves,

upon His knee a little child, just a little peasant child. Yet the Kingdom of Heaven is likened to the heart of this little child. No, dear, it is no cult of meddling I would preach, nor yet would I distress you with hinted heresies or cowardly middle paths. Walk fearlessly in the straight road of the Scriptures. Torn from the setting for which you now weep, stripped of ritual, bare of decoration, how simple is the religion of Christ. God is Love ! Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and thy neighbour as thyself. The Kingdom of Heaven is within you, its condition of membership, the possession of the heart of a little child, its service, the love of one's neighbour. And who is one's neighbour ? He that is nearest. Take heart, go out bravely and find him that is nearest ; nay, he will come to meet you. Your God, your creed, your service, is summed up in one word, the Name of God, Love. And you are no blind visionary. The years of motherhood and nursery care have been training you for fresh fields of work, in this time of aching freedom. You have that great key to human hearts,—a knowledge of the mother-tongue of the country. You will tell me that your Bengali is almost forgotten, that it was never fluent. Granted, but it is there, and in the sunshine, amid the moist green jungles of sleepy Bengal, old memories will stir and bud and blossom. Old forgotten syllables will leap to your lips, the touch of little hands, yes, little brown hands, will heal

your riven heart, and no matter how richly, how generously, you give, still more lavishly will you receive. Sow the seeds of love, dear, sow in tears, tend them with bleeding hands and torn feet, plod on through dark clouds of rebuffs, through the rains of disappointment, and surely a rich harvest of joy, a peaceful autumn of content, shall be yours. Forgive this long sermon, dear. Have patience with the stumbling words, for the blundered message comes from one, who, despondent and bereaved, has trodden this road before you, who has come through a multitude of mistakes, a mountain of perplexity, into a sure heritage of content, a certain hope of an eternal Love. Write, dear, and write often, don't fear to draw on the bank of my experience.

Yours affectionately,

ALICE LANCASTER."

Beatrice let the closely written sheets flutter to her lap, and sank back wearily in her long chair, her hands lying limp upon the fallen pages, her eyes fixed in unseeing gaze upon the broad river before her. She sat in the long, deep verandah, which ran along the whole upper front of a big, two-storeyed bungalow. Round three sides of the bungalow, a grudging strip of compound, on the fourth, spacious tennis courts. From behind a high brick wall on the right, came the monotonous murmur of machinery; from the river bank, the plaintive chant of

coolies, pulling ropes. Beyond the factory buildings, creeping up to the very edge of the tennis courts, the jungle. In the cleared space, wherein stood the house and factory, business and bustle. In the factory precincts, the whirl of modern machinery, the clang and clatter of chains, cranes and trucks. In the offices, a few strenuous, sweating Britishers, working at Western speed on Western lines. Toiling in their wake, a crowd of babus, patient, philosophically phlegmatic, dully plodding through the dimly understood routine of the day; a crowd of rounded pegs, feverishly eager to fill the square holes of Western methods. In the house, something of the elaborate comfort, the fastidious cleanliness, of the West, the books, pictures, musical instruments of far-off lands, space, and even luxury; yet of home, nothing; nothing save small ghosts of absent forms, echoes of pattering feet and baby voices.

All round, the jungle, hiding in its depths, the lives, the joys and woes of other worlds and bygone centuries. A world, as far apart from the busy factory and desolate house as if oceans had rolled between and mountains barricaded. Yet, the jungle crept up to the factory walls, the East trod upon the heels of the West, whispering and waiting. Let the West but falter or faint, and the jungle would roll back in a green tide over the hard-won island of industry, and claim its own. And rolling on, past garden, house, factory, and green whispering jungle, the great

river, the high road to the sea, Mother Ganga, sacramental water for her living children, last resting place of the dead, Homeward road for the weary sons of the West. Across the river, garish in the glare of the afternoon sun, belching the black smoke of their tall chimneys upon the sapphire blue of the November sky, a line of factories. Up the river, so far as the eye could reach, groups of factories, eruptions of ugliness, shrouded with canopies of smoke. Beyond the factories, the smoke of a great city. Down stream, on either side the river, the jungle swarmed up to the banks, and bent over the harassed water, whispering promises of peace, murmuring of the space, the cleansing of the great sea.

And in the long, desolate verandah, amid the mingled hum of the factory, the whisper of the jungle, the surging sob of the river, the clatter of the West and the sigh of the East, sat Beatrice and dreamed. Around her, an India, unknown in song or story. A place of plain, hard facts and dull routine. A climate, where disease and ill health are merely additions to the minor discomforts of daily life. A community, where strenuous toil produces merely daily bread and monthly drafts for Europe, where easily acquired fortunes are unknown, where fame, distinction, even hard-won pensions, are undreamed of. A society, where work is never forgotten, where pleasures are taken sadly, where no man covets his neighbour's wife, where

wives, indeed, are too preoccupied, too deeply absorbed in inward and outward mails, to notice the glance of a neighbour's eye, gaze he never so amorously. An India, in short, so dull, so proper and precise, that it has never been deemed worthy of the pen of a novelist or the tongue of a prophet. Yet, in this India, is staked no small portion of the fortune and future of the British Empire.

The shrill call of a fussy little steam launch on the river roused Beatrice from her reverie. She took up the fallen pages from her lap and glanced again through the clear writing. It was as her friend wrote, she sat in the old verandah, peopled with ghosts of the absent children, memories of running feet, dreams of merry voices throbbing upon the heavy silence; between herself and her husband a gap of five years of life, of work, of experience. Five years, for the woman, of growth, of joy, softened with the sighs of separation. For the man, five years of grinding toil, of fossilising solitude; five years of masculine isolation from women and children, secure from their claims, deprived of their charm. And now, reunion, a sudden change from the individual solitude and independence of celibacy to the intimacy of married life. For the man, domestic changes, disturbing even while welcome. For the woman, the agony of the fresh wounds of recent separation, wounds long since healed and forgotten in the scarred heart of her husband. For the

woman, too, the temptation of daylong solitude and idleness.

Beatrice came again to the end of the many pages of writing. Her friend's statement of her plight and her needs was true enough, but the remedy? Yet, the mystic influence, the power of the writer, was strong upon her. She gathered the sheets together and replaced them in their envelope. Then, rising from her chair, she walked slowly along the verandah and down the staircase, and still dreaming, went through the compound and out into the jungle.

Not every factory on the river bank was so fortunately situated. It had the distinction of being the one ugly, bustling blot on many miles of an unbroken stretch of trees, water, and nestling, mud-walled, brown-thatched villages. Beatrice slipped through the gate of the compound, to find herself on a narrow road, bounded on the one side by thick jungle, stretching back into the unknown world of Bengal village life; on the other by the river, bordered here by a mere fringe of trees, there, thanks to a curve in the road, by a deeper, denser belt of jungle. Through the gaps in the trees came the cool breeze off the water. Upon the silence of the jungle broke the cries from the busy river, that high-road of an Empire. Dotted at frequent intervals were tanks, deep, dark pools of still water, shadowed round with high, green walls of closely clustering trees; some cleared for drinking and bathing, others crusted

over with an emerald carpet of water-plants. Immediately opposite the factory wall was a small bazaar, silent now, but busy enough when the factory poured forth its stream of workers. Beatrice walked away from the bazaar, through the cool, dim aisle of the shaded road, dappled with such rays of the sun as stole down through the canopy of green. The hum of the factory grew fainter as she walked away from it into the green, damp solitude of Bengal. She had no special aim in her walk, she strolled on, in a quiet dream, yet she knew that she walked in literal obedience to the call of the written message in her hand. She was seeking and she would find, she looked for a leader, and leadership was to come from the hand of a little child.

Suddenly, there broke in upon her reverie the merry voices of children. She had come to a corner where the road turned off sharply into the jungle. On either side was a big tank. Upon the pool on the right, in an old boat, a merry crowd of children made a mad voyage. The voyagers sat tightly packed in the bottom of the crazy craft, no bigger and no heavier than a small canoe, while an urchin, a trifle bigger than his companions, punted the boat round the tank with the inevitable bamboo. Round and round spun the boat, in ever lessening circles, to the glee of its occupants and the alarm of the watcher.

“ You’ll sink ! You’ll sink ! ” Beatrice heard her voice ring out the colloquial Bengali she had

deemed forgotten. She was scarcely conscious of having framed the words, alarm had quickened into life the long silent syllables.

“You’ll sink! You’ll sink!” she called again. The children gave no answer. Stopping their mad spinning on the water, they stared across the pool at the Memsahib in silence.

“You’ll sink!” called Beatrice again.

“We shall not sink! We shall not sink!” they called back, realizing that it was indeed the Memsahib who stood and called to them in their own tongue. The half-naked knight of the bamboo pole shot the light craft to the bank, and the children came tumbling out of the boat and scrambling up the bank to the feet of the Memsahib. Merry little brown urchins, these small sons of Bengal. Bare brown bodies, save for the scantiest possible concession of muslin upon the bigger boys, round limbs, black, sleek heads, bright black eyes, and glittering white teeth displayed in cheerful grins.

“What! You understand our talk?” cried the knight of the pole, hitching the scanty drapery more closely to his slim, brown form.

“I understand,” said Beatrice boldly, inwardly fearful of the cascade of voluble vernacular which she knew would pour upon her from all sides.

“No Memsahib understands our talk,” said a voice from the crowd.

“ Yet when I called to you, you understood,” said Beatrice.

Silence, and stares from a dozen pairs of big, black eyes.

“ Whose is the boat ? ” asked Beatrice, by way of encouraging conversation.

“ It is the boat of Hari Chandra Ghose, the father of Bipin,” cried the garrulous youth in the centre of the crowd.

“ And who is Bipin ? ” asked the Memsahib.

Half a dozen eager, brown fingers pointed to the knight of the pole.

“ Of a truth, I am that Bipin,” he nodded. He was a tall, handsome boy of some fourteen years, tall, slim and curly-headed. His face was still radiant and alert, with the youth which disappears so early and so mysteriously from Bengali boys, to give way to the half-despondent, half-insolent apathy of the Bengali twenties. The little fellows around him were all aglow with life and energy. Their dark, velvet eyes, set in clear blue balls, were alight with mischief, bright with intelligence ; the strong, white teeth, the glimpses of clear, red tongues, granted by the parting of the dewy lips in merry smiles, shouted of clean health. They stood before the Memsahib, laughing and mischievous, yet courteous and decorous. It would have been difficult to match their manners in any juvenile British society.

“ And who are you and what is your name ? ” said Beatrice, turning to a small boy, who had wriggled his way through the crowd to her side.

“ I am Krishna Mohan Rai, ” he answered glibly.

“ His father is Surendra Nath Rai, ” cried the garrulous youth.

“ He lives yonder, in the big house, ” shouted another.

“ A pakka house, ” added Krishna, proudly.

“ And you ? And you ? ” One by one, Beatrice got the names of the children. They were for the most part the sons of babus and mistries attached to the factory. Bipin was the son of a contractor, his home was in one of the villages, hidden behind the thick trees on the west of the tank. Most of the children had their homes in the nestling villages, hidden in the jungle.

As Beatrice questioned the children, and strove to separate the long jumble of gabbled syllables into the customary trinities of names, the shrill whistle of the factory siren sounded, and there poured out upon the road a host of workers. Drawing aside from the road, Beatrice watched them stream past. Lean, sun-dried coolies, chattering, in a mixed patois, of pice and rice. Lean-faced, intelligent-looking mistries, with more clothing and less chatter than the scuttling coolies. Babus in flowing

dhoties and neat black coats, or starched white shirts, hanging smockwise over their dhoties, which last, be it known, are a compromise between a petticoat and a divided skirt, contrived by the skilful winding and draping of several yards of white muslin about the lower limbs, finished in front with a long strip, hanging sash-wise from waist to ankles. A graceful dress and dignified. There were but few babus among the home-going throng. Babus, for the most part, had quarters attached to the factory. Those who passed in the rear of the mistries were young men, whom the factory quarters couldn't accommodate, and who had lodgings about the villages. Few as they were, they were sufficient to impress Beatrice with the extraordinary change which passes over Bengali youth between sixteen and twenty. Listless, consequential, indifferent, the young babus strutted past, courteously saluting as they went, but gazing before them with apathetic eyes, as though lacking even the energy for curiosity. Beatrice looked from the bored babus to the bright-eyed boys. What fell power crushed such brave boys into such weary despondent men? Clearly their start in life was good. Seated in her drawing-room in England, confronted with the problem in the form of magazine articles and pictures, she would have been inclined to talk sadly of the purdah system, the wrongs of Eastern women, the poor start in life of the Indian baby, born in the fetid air of the purdahed zenana.

But here were boys, from six to sixteen, every whit the equal in physique and intelligence of English boys of the same age. Yet, in those young babus of eighteen and twenty, what a contrast ! What blight had swept the radiance from their faces ? Pondering, Beatrice turned homewards, the children following. Unconsciously, she held Krishna by the hand. The child walked by her side in decorous silence, his bright black eyes turning again and again to her face.

“ Come to my home,” he said softly, drawing on her hand.

“ How shall I come to your home ? ” asked Beatrice.

“ Come ! Come ! ” said Krishna, drawing on her hand.

“ Behold, thy mother knows me not. Without an invitation, how shall I come ? ” asked Beatrice.

“ There shall be an invitation, there shall be an invitation,” cried Krishna eagerly.

“ Enough,” said Beatrice, patting the up-turned cheek. “ When that invitation shall be, then will I come.” She turned in at the gate, leaving the children behind.

“ It is the Bara Memsahib,” she heard Bipin tell the crowd.

The sun glowed red over the river, as Beatrice sank down in her chair on the solitary

verandah, for the Sahib worked long and late. The sky glowed red in the west, and the brown cheek of the river blushed, as the sinking sun stooped low over the water; gold lighted the red to orange, orange softened to purple as the sun sank lower, and the purple blended into the velvety darkness of an Eastern night. Beatrice leaned back in her chair, watching, with beauty-loving eyes, the night's never-failing miracle. The crude buildings, gaunt chimneys and belching smoke sank into the velvet pall of the soft, warm darkness. Followed, rippling scales of twinkling lights, which ran along the factory quarters, until every window was ablaze, and the crude buildings of daylight became the fairy palaces of the night. And the river, forsaken by her laggard lover, the sleeping sun, sparkled in the smiles of the blazing palaces, and mirrored their lights in her black waters, until the moon rose, white and silvery, and put the lights of men to shame. Then the fickle river turned from the palace lights to the wooing of the moon, and, in that chaste embrace, became a silver path to the eternal sea. Beatrice looked and smiled, the touch of little fingers still warm and clinging about her hand, and in her heart, resurrection throbbings of life and love.

CHAPTER II.

BUT fairyland vanished before the first searching rays of the rising sun. As the moonlight faded and the darkness rolled back before the advancing daylight, the splendour of the lighted lines of windows dwindled and died, and the palaces of the night became the mills and chimneys of the day. Before them, the river rolled, brown, turbid, and burdened with the business of the strenuous West. The soft sighs of the night were drowned in the hum and clatter of the toils of the day.

It seemed to Beatrice, seated alone in the verandah, perplexed with domestic problems, dismayed by the long stretch of empty hours before her, that her soul was the scene of a morning transformation, no less ruthless than that on the river banks. Last night, in the magic light of the moon, her way had shown plain in a world of romance. Last night, with the clasp of little fingers still warm about her hand, the ring of childish voices in her ears, with love glowing in her hungry heart, she had deemed night's weeping ended. But morning brought no joy. She woke, with separation's dull weight on her heart, and stepped from anxious dreams into a dark cloud of longing.

Comfort and companionship had been moonlight illusions, she was back in her loneliness, empty-armed and hungry-hearted. She read and re-read Alice Lancaster's letter, but its mystic power had melted in the sunlight. Alice had dreamed among her mountains, even as Beatrice had dreamed in the moonlight. The message of the letter was but a foolish vision, the experiences of the previous evening were but quixotic whims. She had neither part nor lot in that life among the brown, thatched villages of the whispering jungle. She was fast bound to this tiny, strenuous island of facts, burdened with maternal cares, yet bereft of the caresses of children, doomed to dwell between East and West in a perpetual solitude. Her courage died within her as she pondered. And while, exiled in the East, she mourned her lost kingdom, surely time was effacing her footprints in the West. What could the fruits of separation be, but to be forgotten by her children? Then, to what end the pains of motherhood, the strenuous years of tending and training? A wild tide of resentment poured over Beatrice. She rose and paced the verandah in the growing heat. It was not too late. She had not yet lost her mother's kingdom in the West. What was the devouring passion of a man beside the tender needs of children? And had a mother no claim, no rights in the joys of the world? There rose visions of long, peaceful days at sea, peaceful even under the shadow of war. Aye! the

shadow of war was added to the daily dreads of separation. Who should say how near it might creep to the children? Who could tell when it might descend suddenly between herself and them, an impenetrable barrier? There was still time. She would go! She would go! At the most she would remain only for the three months of the Cold Weather. Five months, the common Anglo-Indian tribute of wifely duty, must suffice. With the first breath of the Indian spring, she must go.

So, in restless planning, and brooding rebellion, the hours dragged on to midday. The Sahib sent excuses, business pressed even heavier than usual. Beatrice found a momentary relief from mental torments in the ordering and despatching of a meal to his office. The simple duty turned her thoughts to healthier channels. Her solitary meal, served with the scrupulous ceremony of Eastern service, ended, the servants closed the doors, barred the windows, and departed to their own quarters. The house sank into the midday silence of the East. The noise of the factory filtered thinly through the shuttered windows in a drowsy hum, broken only by the muffled calls of the passing steamers, which swept the brown flood of the river before them, till its waters came roaring up the banks and fell washing back whence they came, with the surge and swell of the surf on a beach. Within the house, silence and solitude, and, even a early November, drowsy heat and whirling

fans. Beatrice, worn with rebellious sorrow, heavy with unshed tears, flung herself upon the long couch in the dim drawing-room, and fell into a dreamless sleep. And the river came washing up its banks with messages of comfort, promises of magic nights and healing moonlight. Sleep swept sorrow from face and brain, Beatrice woke sane and soothed. Over her tea she read her letter yet again, and, as yesterday, felt its mystic message stir and quicken in her soul. She rose and took the path into the jungle.

In the shadow of the great gate, his small eager face turned towards the house, stood the little Krishna. With a cry of joy, he started to run towards the Memsahib, then pulled up, lifted little joined hands to his forehead, and from bowing low, raised his head, and smiled up into the Memsahib's face from beneath the arch of his hands.

"Namashkar," he said.

"Namashkar," returned Beatrice, smiling down from under a like arch of joined fingers.

"Come with me," said Krishna eagerly, slipping slim, brown fingers into her hand. "Let us go together to my home."

"Except thy mother bid me, how shall I go?" said Beatrice, smiling down into the little dark face.

"Behold, great is the desire of my mother to speak with the Memsahib," urged Krishna, drawing on her hand.

“ Since noon has he stood at the gate,” said the tall durwan.

“ I waited for the coming of the Memsahib,” said Krishna, anxiously, fearful lest he should have given offence.

“ Had I known of thy waiting, I would have summoned thee,” said Beatrice, gently.

“ Come with me ! Come with me ! ” said Krishna again, and drawing on her hand.

Yielding to the child’s entreaty, Beatrice turned with him out of the gate. He led her to the house he had pointed out to her on the previous evening. The house stood plumb up to the roadside. At one end was a tiny verandah and a door, evidently the professional quarters of the doctor babu, for over the verandah, fronting to the road, was a sign bearing the legend, “ Dr. Surendra Nath Rai. Patients attended with care.” The windows facing the road were closely shuttered. Beatrice stood under them, hesitating, and still, Krishna drew on her hand and implored.

“ Let the Memsahib show favour and enter, ” said a voice from behind the half-opened shutter.

“ Hear the voice of my mother ! Come ! Come ! ” said Krishna. Beatrice hesitated no longer, but let Krishna lead her round to the back of the house, to a secluded entrance facing into the jungle. He pushed open a tall door in the high brick wall, and led her across a tiny courtyard to the house.

“ Let the Memsahib enter,” said the soft voice again, and Beatrice passed through the door into the dim chamber within.

“ Namashkar,” said the voice. Beatrice saw before her a girl of not more than twenty,—small, slender, with refined features and the gentle, resigned expression of the women of Bengal. Over a white petticoat and dark-coloured short-sleeved blouse, she wore a white sari with a black border. The sari, a ten-cubit swathe of fine muslin, was wound skirt-wise round the nether limbs, drawn in long diagonal folds from ankles to the left shoulder, and finally thrown over the head, leaving the face free or veiling it, as the wearer inclined, and falling away behind in graceful folds to the heels. Gold and glass bangles covered the slender arms from wrist to elbow. A heavy gold bracelet, round in shape and covered with fantastic designs, clasped the upper arm. A gold-mounted pearl hung from the delicate nostril, the jewel gleaming white against the golden brown of the skin. Pearls, set in gold, swung from the tiny ears, a chain of heavy gold beads shone on the slim neck. Clearly, Krishna’s mother was prepared for visitors. Nor was she the type of woman common to the jungle villages. Her jewels hinted at prosperity, the blouse and skirt under the sari, of concessions to Western ideas, the sweet face and gracious manners bore the record of good breeding.

“ Namashkar,” said Beatrice, returning the greeting.

“ Let the Memsahib be seated,” said the mother of Krishna, drawing forward the customary single chair of a Bengali household.

Beatrice sat down and looked around her. She saw the usual bare, whitewashed apartment of a Bengali house, its only furniture a big taktaposh, the wooden platform which does duty as a bed by night and as a seat by day. The taktaposh was stripped of bedclothes, and furnished with only one or two round bolsters, a sure sign of ultra-refinement and care. The walls were bare, save for bookshelves, crowded with books. On a small table were pens, writing materials and more books—amongst them, a Bible.

“ The Scriptures of my people ! ” exclaimed Beatrice, holding up the book.

“ The Scriptures of the Christians,” agreed the little wife. “ My husband reads much, he has much learning.”

“ He has many books,” said Beatrice, looking round the room.

“ In this place, his books are few, ” said the little woman, with a deprecatory wave of a small, ringed hand. “ In the house of my father-in-law there be many books.”

“ And you,” said Beatrice, “ do you also read and write ? ”

“ I read and write,” said Krishna’s mother, simply.

“ And I,” cried Krishna, who had pressed closely to the Memsahib, “ I also read and write.”

“ Great is thy wisdom,” laughed Beatrice, pressing the child to her side.

A faint jingle of anklets and bracelets, a breath of spicy scent, and another woman entered the room. She was younger, slighter, and more gaily dressed than the mistress of the house. Her silk sari, of rich peach shade, framed features, finely chiselled, and showed up a skin of palest wheat-colour. The fair complexion intensified the soft velvety darkness of the large, almond-shaped eyes, the fine black arch of the black eyebrows, the shadow of the long lashes. Jewels adorned face, arms, and forehead. A gentle modesty veiled the calm assurance of an acknowledged beauty. A little girl clung to her hand, gazing wide-eyed at the Memsahib.

“ Namashkar,” said the newcomer, bowing gracefully and smiling up at Beatrice from under the arch of her hands.

“ My sister-in-law,” said the house-mistress, as Beatrice returned the greeting.

“ Is this your little girl ?” said Beatrice, holding out the hand unclaimed by Krishna. But the child shrank away and clung more closely to her mother, while still gazing, as though spell-bound, at the Memsahib.

“ She has fear, ” smiled the mother. “ Never before has she seen a Memsahib.”

“ Yet she spake much of the coming of the Memsahib,” said Krishna’s mother.

“ And has the Memsahib sons and daughters ? ” asked she of the wheaten skin.

“ Three sons and one daughter,” said Beatrice, sighing.

“ And what is the age of your Honour’s daughter ? ”

“ Thirteen,” said Beatrice.

“ Has she as yet made her marriage ? ”

“ As yet, she is unmarried,” returned Beatrice.

“ The daughters of the Sahib-folk do not marry at a small age,” said the little wife, with the consciousness of superior information.

“ The people of our caste, also,” said the sister-in-law, “ do not marry in their smallest time. Fourteen were my years at the time of my marriage. ”

“ My daughter will not marry before she is twenty,” said Beatrice, who until that afternoon had never given a thought to Daisy’s matrimonial prospects. “ Perchance, it may be her wish not to make a marriage.”

“ Not her wish ! ” exclaimed the little women in horrified chorus.

“ With many Miss Sahibs, there is no desire of marriage,” said Beatrice.

“ And if marriage be not their wish ? ” asked the little wife.

“ Then, of a surety, there is no necessity to make a marriage,” said Beatrice.

“ Bapre Bap ! ” exclaimed the sister-in-law. “ And these Miss Sahibs who make no marriage, who gives them to eat, and whence comes their apparel ? ”

“ And by what means do they obtain jewels ? ” shrilled the listening Krishna.

“ Even as Sahibs do they work and by the work of their hands do they obtain earnings. Having money, how shall they lack food or raiment ? ” returned Beatrice.

“ And jewels ? ” insisted Krishna.

“ For jewels they have freedom, for gems, learning,” said Beatrice, gravely.

“ And they make no marriage ? ” said the sister-in-law again.

“ Except they desire a husband, they make no marriage.”

“ We have heard that the Memsahibs come and go, even as Sahibs,” said the sister-in-law.

“ My husband also has told me of these matters,” said the little wife. “ Yet your Honour’s daughter ? Will she also make no marriage ? ”

“ Who can say ? ” returned Beatrice.

“ Great is our desire to look upon the daughter of the Memsahib,” said the sister-in-law, eagerly. “ Let your Honour show favour and bring the Miss Sahib.”

“ My daughter is in England,” said Beatrice sadly.

“ In England ! ” exclaimed the women. “ And how does your Honour’s daughter dwell in England alone ? ”

“ She is not alone. She reads in school,” returned Beatrice.

“ Ah ! She will have much learning. She will the Bee A pass make,” they nodded wisely.

Beatrice smiled and shook her head. To explain the vastly different standards of Indian and English universities, or to describe Daisy’s vigorous school life, was too big a task for an afternoon visit. “ My sons are also in England, and in school,” she said, by way of changing the subject.

“ What ! ” exclaimed the little women. “ Are all the children of the Memsahib in England ? ”

“ All,” said Beatrice.

“ And the parents of your Honour ? ”

“ In England.”

“ And the parents of the Sahib ? ”

“ All, all our own people are in England. ”

“ In all this land, is there not one to call your own ? ”

“ Not one.”

“ Great God ! What a grievous condition ! ”
 “ Yet why are your Honour’s children thus far from your side ? Is this so stern a rule the custom of the Sahibs ? ”

Slowly, in her halting Bengali, Beatrice strove to explain the difficulties of climate, health, education.

“ My husband has often spoken of the lack of opportunity in this country,” chimed in the little wife. “ He has told me of the good schools and the great learning of England.”

“ Yet, is it by reason of the need of learning, or according to the wish of the Memsahibs, that they dwell thus apart from their children ? ” said the sister-in-law, in a puzzled voice.

“ Of a surety it is not by the wish of the Memsahibs,” said Beatrice, her voice quivering with convincing warmth.

“ Yet we had heard,” said the sister-in-law, “ that the Memsahibs had no love for their children, and for this reason they gave them as babes into the hands of servants, and banished them in their greater years to schools across the sea.”

Beatrice shook her head, and drew Krishna closer to her.

“And do you grieve much?” asked the little wife tenderly.

But Beatrice bent over Krishna and made no reply.

“Yet tell us,” pursued the inquiring lady of the fair complexion, “since it is so grievous to the Memsahibs to dwell thus apart from their children, why do they also not remain with their children in England?”

“We are even as yourselves,” said Beatrice, raising her head, and smiling an April smile at the lovely, puzzled face. “We are even as you, our husbands have need of us. Shall a wife walk according to her own pleasure?” She marvelled at the words which she heard come from her lips, rather than formed consciously in her brain. Not on these lines the feverish meditation of the morning.

“Ah, duty,” exclaimed the women in chorus, their faces lighting up in eager comprehension. “Ah, yes! That we understand well. For a woman, what is life but duty?”

“Then for duty, you leave your children and dwell apart in grief?” asked the little wife, in tender concern.

“For duty,” said Beatrice, her sense of unworthiness deepening as the little women bent tender, reverential eyes upon her.

“We Bengali women are taught of duty from our smallest years,” said the sister-in-law.

“Of a truth, no woman may walk according to her own will or pleasure,” nodded the little wife. “Yet we had heard that the Memsahibs gave no ear to the voice of their husbands, but according to their pleasure, went free.”

“Further,” chimed in the sister-in-law, “from the lips of the Memsahib, have we not heard that, except such be their desire, the daughters of the Sahibs make no marriage?”

“Hear me,” said Beatrice, and again she marvelled at her own maxims; “it is true that the Miss Sahibs, according to their will, make marriages or walk free of marriage. Yet, having married, according to the will of her husband is the will of the wife. The lives of those twain are one.”

“But that is *our* faith!” cried the little women. We say, “The life of the husband and wife is one life.”

“It is the teaching of these Scriptures also,” said Beatrice, laying her hand on the Bible on the little table.

The three women sat silent before this undreamed of bond of unity between them.

“Yet the duty of the Memsahibs is hard,” said the sister-in-law, with conviction.

“Very stern are the customs of the Sahibs,” asserted the little wife. “As for me, I also know something of the griefs of separation and of solitude.”

“ But you are in your own home. You make your dwelling among your own people.”

The little women shook their heads, and broke into eager denials. No, this was not their home ; this their dwelling place was little less foreign to them than to the Memsahib. In a voluble duet, which Beatrice was fain to interrupt from time to time for explanations and repetitions, they poured out a description of the patriarchal home in East Bengal. The big bari (homestead) of their father-in-law, with its many ghar, the clustering, thatched houses which combine, within an encircling wall, to form the joint family home. The big, outer courtyard with its many visitors and bustling business. The inner courtyard of the women, with the rows of tiny chambers sacred to the various gods, closed for the greater portion of the year, but each in its season a centre of festivity and gladness. The little household temple, sheltering the family deity, the beloved sanctuary of the devout mother of the house, the scene of the daily prayers of the women and children of the whole family, lovingly tended, flower-decked, incense-scented.

They told, with eager, smiling faces, of the many members and varied interests of a Bengali joint-household. At its head, a beneficent autocrat, the old father, who, in reality, bowed before a greater power than himself, their old mother-in-law. A proud woman she, who directed the conduct of the wives of several sons,

who controlled the rearing of an army of grandchildren, a veritable queen. They described the busy bustle of everyday life, its pleasant duties, lightened by servants, cheered by co-operation, gay with the chatter of a multitude of women-folk. Sickness had little terror for them. Where one was sick, a dozen eager hands took up the neglected duties, and watched over the children. And life was so gay, so different. The purdah system? Oh, yes, they kept purdah, how should women, of good rank and breeding, unveil their faces to the eyes of the world? But in a Hindu village, safe from the fear of Musulmans, the hard rule of the purdah was not, as in this country, grievous to be borne. The little women told of the gay bands of women and girls who wound their way at dawn, through the narrow, shaded tracks to the river bank, there to perform the sacramental bathing, to exchange gossip with village friends, and watch the sport of the children in the water. They drew vivid pictures of the visits, flower-laden, gift-burdened, to the village temples. They told of the glad times of the Pujas, the preparations, the feasting and entertaining, the visits to friends.

“And here?” said Beatrice.

“Ah, here, we are indeed strangers and prisoners,” said the sister-in-law, who was apparently a lady with a taste for society.

“Here to walk in the roads is impossible,” said the little wife.

“ There be many Musulmans in these parts,” explained the sister-in-law.

“ Yet they call this river, Ganga. Do you not bathe in its waters or go forth to make puja in the temple ? ”

“ Nay, we neither bathe in the river, nor go to the temples,” said the little wife.

“ This is a place without opportunity,” said the sister-in-law.

“ And have you a household temple ? ” asked Beatrice.

“ Nay,” said the little wife. “ Of opportunity there is nought.”

Beatrice was puzzled. She had expected to come in upon a small edition of such a patriarchal establishment as the pair had described to her. These two little exiles were a problem, new to her experience.

“ Then we are all alike, bideshi (exiled), in this country,” she said slowly. “ I had thought to find my neighbours happy, dwelling in their own country. Behold, I find them strangers and solitary, even as myself.”

“ The words of the Memsahib are true words, we are strangers and foreigners, even as herself.”

“ Yet, you are twain,” said Beatrice, looking from one to the other ; “ with each other you may have converse.”

“ Yet only for a time,” said the little wife. “ Behold, after a few days, my sister-in-law must leave me. Has not her mother-in-law called her ? ”

“ And you ? ” asked Beatrice.

“ It may be that she also will go to our own home,” nodded the sister-in-law.

“ Oh, I hope not ! ” exclaimed Beatrice, her heart sinking at the prospect of losing her new-found friend. “ Yet to go, would be to your profit,” she added gently.

The little wife smiled and sighed.

“ For three days there would be gladness, after that sorrow,” said the sister-in-law, nodding a wisdom-laden head. “ Last month, concerning her going, how great was her joy ! To-day, the time being near, sadness comes upon her.”

“ Why are you thus sad ? ” asked Beatrice, gently.

“ For that I know not when I shall return,” came the soft reply. “ To go for one month, that is well. To remain absent many months, that is grievous.”

“ But why not go for a month ? ” asked Beatrice.

“ At the call of our mother-in-law, she must go. Except by the order of that mother-in-law, she may not return,” said the lady of the wheaten skin, with decision.

Beatrice sat silent before a code of duty too stern for comment. Suddenly, the sweet, patient face before her was lit with smiles. Beatrice turned her head in the direction of the window, from which the shutters were swinging back. The short November evening was closing in. There was barely sufficient light to make clear a face at the tiny window.

“The Sahib awaits the coming of the Mem-sahib,” said a man’s voice.

Beatrice rose with the alacrity that was clearly expected. “May I come again?” she said, using the customary farewell of Bengal.

“Come,” returned the little women, bowing and smiling under the arch of their hands.

The old chaprassi stood at the gate, lantern in hand. He walked some few paces ahead, holding the lantern to light the path, and step by step, through the warm, whispering darkness of the jungle, Beatrice followed the guiding light. As she turned in at the big gate, her hand was caught in a firm, warm clasp, and drawn to a resting place on a strong arm.

“Home,” she whispered contentedly, drawing closer. She had travelled far that afternoon.

CHAPTER III.

BEATRICE described her evening's adventure to her husband as they sat at dinner and partook of that elaborate meal, according to the rites and ceremonies of a self-respecting khansaman. Great is the Indian reverence for ceremony. Let the scene of the culinary operations be never so squalid, the raw materials reduced to the last limit of lean murgghi (fowl) and anæmic mutton, the cook must mix, mince and mould his unpromising materials into an imposing menu of many courses. And that feeble frame of feathered skin, the Indian fowl, suffering every impossible culinary change into dishes, strange if not rich, must pass to a glorious end upon silver dishes, fortified by every domestic rite the ingenuity of the khansaman tribe has devised. But the meal, served by the old khansaman, was not wholly composed of murgghi. The fates looked favourably on the factory folk ; there was a good cook in the kitchen, a good bazaar within reach. The Sahib fed sumptuously as became the dignity of his servants. The Sahib looked upon the Memsahib and smiled, and the khansaman took credit to himself. He had never heard of "Feed the brute," but he knew full well that conjugal bliss is for the most part compounded in the bawarchi-khanah.

In the light of her afternoon's experiences Beatrice looked at her husband with a new interest. She was profoundly conscious of the contrast between the high ideals accredited to her by the little Bengali women, and her own mental attitude towards her husband. Yet she knew in her soul that the ideals were no vain visions, that only an unflinching devotion to duty could make possible this divided life. She saw before her, a man in the late thirties, tall, well made, with the quiet courtesy and assured authority which characterises the Sahib. Long years of Indian life had left no trace of ill-health, though the lines about the fine forehead, and alert, dark eyes, told of a strenuous life. His friends mourned the waste of a fine brain and cultured intellect upon the sordid toil of factory management. His enemies deplored the absurdity, of a decoratively educated idealist at the head of a practical, growing concern. The Sahib himself saw neither calamity nor absurdity in his position, and he was right. The burden of Empire-making is borne no less in factories than in Government offices. The Sahib was the gracious and approved autocrat of his own special portion of British territory. Upon him depended the prosperity, health, and general well-being of the majority of the inhabitants of the surrounding villages. Not that the world of thatched villages, hidden in the whispering jungle, was much less of a mystery to him than to Beatrice. A cursory knowledge of the vernaculars brought

him into rather closer touch with the tenants and employés of the factory property, but he knew these men only as their overlord, the beneficent despot of the locality. Their homes were closed to him, their lives, thoughts, aims, unknown quantities. The very language, which constituted the sole medium of communication between himself and these people, whether English or vernacular, was a tongue apart, a scanty gleaning of words from either race, framing ideas, foreign to the national life of both speakers. Yet, there was sympathy between the Sahib and the villagers. To quote his friends, he suffered endless imposition from the wily Indian. In the language of his enemies, he was "all for the native." But the secret of the undoubted power of the Sahib, admitted alike by friends and foes, was simply a manly kindness, and honest fairness to all mankind. In his presence, the Indian villagers, supersensitive, painfully self-conscious, knew themselves secure from the ridicule more dreaded than wounds, certain of justice, assured of the tempering of severity with mercy. And he spake with authority, this Sahib. He had knowledge of customs, respect for faiths, he understood the difficulties of a tradition-bound people. He knew the folly of fruitless haste, he grudged not time nor spared strength in his many and frequent inquiries into village politics. And his reward? Verily the reward of a Greater than he, Who also suffered a stiff-necked,

prejudiced people. A guerdon of further service, an increasing demand on his patience, a blind, blundering dependence on his common sense, an unceasing drain on his British energy. No light task to stiffen the wills and soften the prejudices of a custom-ridden, suspicious folk. And, as the East leaned its heavy, helpless weight on his willing shoulders, the West eyed such incomprehensible devotion with distrust and distaste. To what end, this waste of heart and brain? For what ultimate gain, this outlay of energy and concern? But the Sahib, strengthened by knowledge, wise by experience held on, his aim, just to do his job, his reward, the suspicions of the many, but the love of a few.

“So you have found social claims, even in the jungle,” said the Sahib, conscious only of his wife’s unwonted serenity, but, as the khansaman justly divined, comfortably influenced by good cookery.

Beatrice described her visit to the house of the doctor babu. Of the actual fact of her excursion, he had already been informed by many eager voices and in a variety of tongues. Secret deeds are not for the Memsahib-folk. “I know Surendra Nath Rai,” said the Sahib. “A decent fellow. Acts as *locum* here, when our own man takes leave or goes sick. Not the sort of fellow you would expect to find practising in the jungle.”

“No, indeed,” said Beatrice, and she described the bookshelves, the writing materials, and told of the refinement and education of the women of the house.

“By the way,” said the Sahib, “he has just put in a fortnight’s duty, our man came back yesterday. Surely you must have met Surendra.”

“Oh, *that* babu !” exclaimed Beatrice, her face clouding at the recollection of the awkward young babu she had had occasion to consult, in connection with some sick servant, a few days previously. The doctor babu *locum tenens* was anything but the embodiment of the picture she had formed of the owner of the bookshelves, in the house in the jungle. He was awkward and shy. His manners had lost their Bengali grace, and failed to acquire Western confidence. Though he could not have attained his medical qualification without a very considerable knowledge of English, his verbal acquaintance with that language was of the scantiest. So difficult had Beatrice found it to follow the intricacies of his Bengali Johnsonese that she had, at the risk of giving deep offence, taken refuge in Hindustani. And this man was a scholar, a deep reader. Beatrice began to fear that she had made her deductions too hastily. Perhaps the bookshelves testified to the culture of a predecessor.

“ Did they tell you how they came to be here at all ? ” asked the Sahib.

“ No, ” said Beatrice. “ And I confess I was puzzled. Had the babu taken an appointment in the works, I could have understood it. But to come so far from his village to practise in a jungle—it is curious, isn’t it ? ”

“ Oh, he has had some family connection here, depend upon it, ” said the Sahib. “ Curious that you didn’t hear what it was. A Bengali generally either snubs you to complete silence, or obliges with his entire family history. ”

Beatrice was silent, she was conscious that her own personality had directed the course of the conversation that afternoon.

“ I wondered if I might arrange to read up my Bengali with this babu, provided he were willing, ” she said meditatively.

“ Hm. . . m. . . ! ” said the Sahib doubtfully. “ What made you think of that ? ”

“ Chiefly the books, ” said Beatrice. “ He is evidently a reader. Then the women are refined, and for Bengali women of their class, cultured. After all, I want some one to correct my accent and help me to fluent conversation rather than to give me advanced literary teaching. ”

“ It would be a good hobby, ” said the Sahib thoughtfully, as his eyes dwelled approvingly on his wife’s brighter looks.

“ Is there any objection to this babu’s reading with me ? ” asked Beatrice.

“ No, I think not,” said the Sahib. “ It might be another matter if he were one of my men. There is rather a difficulty about sending a babu to sit with the Memsahib, you know. However, you cannot read up your vernaculars unless you do sit at a table with a native. I’ll send for Surendra to-morrow, shall I ? I confess I’d rather set you going myself. Looks better, you know.” And the Sahib eyed Beatrice a trifle apologetically.

“ Yes, yes,” said Beatrice, “ I see, it would be better to have your official approval.”

“ All right ! All right ! That’s settled. I’ll send him along,” said the Sahib.

Beatrice felt her first unfavourable impression of Surendra confirmed, rather than dispelled, as the young babu greeted her next morning, with the awkward salutation, that one-handed compromise between the Bengali namashkar and the stately salaam of the upcountry Musulman, for which the modern Bengali has seen good to discard the graceful greeting of his own countrymen. The gesture with which Surendra accompanied his offhand “ Good morning,” suggested the shake of a clenched fist rather than a courteous greeting. Beatrice looked at him doubtfully, the invitation to be seated died on her lips, and she remained standing. Surendra gazed back at her with grave interest.

Certainly, his expression was frank, his face, honest and fearless. He was a handsome young fellow of not more than twenty-five, tall for a Bengali, and spare to leanness.

“The Sahib said.....” he began slowly.

“Yes,” said Beatrice, rousing herself. “I wished to see you, Babu.” She hesitated how to open the conversation. “I called at your house yesterday,” she said at last.

Surendra’s face became a mask. “Yes,” he said simply.

Beatrice made a slight gesture of exasperation. Clearly, her evening visit was not to form a bond of acquaintance.

“I wish to read Bengali,” she blurted out, speaking the vernacular. “I hope you will help me.”

Surendra’s face lit up, his awkwardness disappeared. “Yes, I have heard,” he said eagerly. “The Memsahib speaks Bengali.”

“Only a little,” said Beatrice. “I wish to learn. I hope you will read with me.”

“Without doubt,” returned Surendra, all apathy gone. “It will be necessary every day, to read a little, as also every day, to write a little.”

“When can you come?” asked Beatrice, and straightway encountered her first difficulty. Surendra’s only leisure was in the sleepy hours of mid-day, when patients ceased from troubling

and when Memsahibs prefer taking their ease to tackling vernaculars. However, difficulties there would surely be. Beatrice fixed her first lesson for one o'clock on the following day, and awaited the arrival of her teacher with a certain amount of trepidation. Her previous studies had been conducted at odd intervals, with a missionary friend, with whom she had exchanged visits. She had had no experience of regular instruction from a Bengali. To sit at a table with a babu was, as her husband had hinted, a novel experience. Beatrice found her exasperation of the previous day rising again, as Surendra stood awkwardly by, while she drew chairs up to the table in the shady verandah. The old chaprassi, from his customary post on the staircase, seeing his Memsahib thus engaged, hurried to her assistance, his face a picture of haughty disapproval. Surendra, apparently saw nothing wrong. He dropped into his own chair without waiting for Beatrice to seat herself. On the other hand, he sat perfectly silent and waited for his pupil to open the lesson.

"I wish to acquire practice in speaking Bengali," said Beatrice in her halting vernacular.

"Bengali," said Surendra, with sudden energy, speaking in English, "is the deeficult. Many words, all same theeng. Iss 'Bara' and 'Bara.' One 'Bara' meaning bridegroom. One

‘Bara’ meaning big.” He launched out into a semi-unintelligible discourse, which might have been useful, had Beatrice wished to inquire into the possibilities of the Bengali language in the direction of puns. Beatrice saw that she would have to direct the lessons herself.

“Let Mahasaya show favour and speak to me only Bengali,” she suggested, slowly.

“That will be well,” assented Surendra, obligingly, his face plainly showing his disappointment at the non-appreciation of his lecture.

“To-day,” continued Beatrice, slowly, “I will try only to make conversation.”

“It will be well,” agreed Surendra. Then concerning what matters shall we converse?”

“We will speak of the matters of the worship of images,” said Beatrice.

Surendra showed no emotion, further than a slight elevation of his black eyebrows. Beatrice often wondered afterwards, how she came to choose such a subject for her first lesson in Bengali conversation. Her speech was, perforce, slow, halting, and broken by many a pause for correction of pronounciation, or for reference to the dictionary. Yet, five years previously, she had been no mean Bengali scholar and the forgotten words and phrases came to her lips as she strove to frame her questions. After all, was it so unlikely a subject, in view of the problems which had perplexed her mind for

the past few days ? The very sight of a Hindu suggests religion ; is not his whole life either a long religious observance, or a perpetual strife with religious opposition ? Besides, had not Alice Lancaster's letter suggested a like attitude towards the Christian faith, and had not the little Bengali women credited Beatrice with equally stringent principles as the guide of her daily life ? Subconsciously, Beatrice's thoughts had been busy with the comparison of her own attitude towards these matters with that of her Bengali acquaintance. She saw herself, as she had written to Alice Lancaster, solitary, unsupported, clinging to a faith discarded by the men of her race, separated from the comforting rites of that faith, yet, in the light of her friend's letter, heavily pressed, in this land of hungry needs, by the burden of its obligations. She pictured her little Bengali friends as sustained by their husbands' faith. She imagined a household ritual, a simple, unquestioning trust in their family deities. It was a shock to hear Surendra say, simply,—

“ For my part, I am without faith in the worship of images.”

Slowly, patiently, with due regard to her scanty vocabulary and unaccustomed ear, he gave the outlines of his personal view of Hinduism. For him, the many gods of that faith were no less myths than for Beatrice. He neither feared Siva nor trusted in Vishnu, yet it

was clear, that his actual faith went beyond his spoken words, for his face lit up at the mention of Krishna. "I believe in Ishwar," he said reverently. Yet Ishwar did not appear to be the "Father" of the Christian Incarnation, but rather a vague, pantheistic Deity, a subject rather for arguments, discussions and poetic rhapsodies, than a Being, to whom was due, love and worship. Beatrice listened, puzzled and vaguely disturbed.

"Do you pray?" she asked, at length, striving to arrive at some definite factor of faith or unbelief.

"Sometimes," returned Surendra vaguely. "But to Ishwar, I use no images, I have no fixed words."

"Have you fixed times?" pursued Beatrice. "Do you not make the morning and evening pujas?"

"I make no pujas," returned Surendra, simply.

"But you believe," said Beatrice, puzzled; "you are devoted to Krishna."

"Ah, Krishna!" and again the dark face lit up, and he launched once more upon a sea of flowery metaphor.

"Then you believe," said Beatrice. "Though you make no pujas, yet you believe."

Surendra shook his head. "I am absolutely without faith," he returned.

"Yet your wife" began Beatrice.

He smiled tenderly, "Women believe much," he said, "such is the nature of women."

"And your mother?" asked Beatrice.

"My mother believes very much," said Surendra, his voice soft, his eyes tender. "She makes many pujas, she spends much time in the household temple."

"And your father?"

"In his youth, my father was even as myself," said Surendra, with simple candour. "He made no pujas. Now, in his old age, he seeks the gods, and spends much time in prayer. I also in the time of old age will give my life to these matters."

"Yet why delay?" said Beatrice. "Is not a lifelong devotion better than this anxiety in old age?"

"Better, it may be," said Surendra, calmly, "but in the young, anxiety for these matters is not natural. When the pleasures of youth are gone, when strength and desire have left the body, then to seek the gods is according to the nature of man."

"But you may die young," suggested Beatrice.

"That is according to the will of Ishwar," said Surendra calmly.

"Are all Bengalis, thus, without faith?" asked Beatrice.

“For the most part, except Brahmans, and men of no learning,” said Surendra.

“And the Brahmans”.... began Beatrice.

“Is not belief to their interest?” said Surendra, with a sceptical smile.

“For my part, it seems a calamity that the Hindu faith should become nought,” said Beatrice.

“A calamity! You think the loss of the Hindu faith a calamity!” exclaimed Surendra in great astonishment.

“Is not any faith better than unbelief?” asked Beatrice. “And your wife and your mother, do they not grieve because of this your unbelief?” But as she spoke, the telephone bell rang violently. The old chaprassi, returning from answering it, reported that the Sahib called for the doctor babu. Surendra, dropping arguments, apologetics and metaphors, hastened to duty, and Beatrice was left to her own meditations.

So it was not the peculiar burden of the women of the white races, this lonely upholding of faith and tradition. She had seen, even in her thirty years, the women of her race, oppressed by further and heavier responsibilities, family, social, political, until, so it seemed to Beatrice, the Sahibs had laid the very charge of their souls upon the shoulders of their women-kind. Since she had left the atmosphere of the

simple faith of her children, to realize, in her solitary leisure, something of the empty materialism round her, she had thought that the suffering of women for the benefit of men in time, must, in expiation of this general unbelief, extend into Eternity. That women, though baffled, in time, might, by further suffering, fiercer strife, win faith for their men-kind on the other side the gulf. And she had deemed this the burden and the privilege of Christian women. She had envied her Eastern sisters an imagined masculine support. She had pictured them ruled, submissive, but guarded, protected, consoled and uplifted in the perplexities of married life, by a joint faith. And it was not so ! These frail little women, with their appallingly lofty standards of conjugal and filial duty, stood alone in their piety. Their men-kind were as kindly sceptical of their faith, as they were tenderly contemptuous of their sex. They demanded the high ideals, snatched at the life-long sacrifice, but denied the faith, the foundation from which these good gifts sprang. Western women had suffered and rebelled, had sought, in a wrestle for rights and justice, compensation for the tender rule, the god-fearing support, which is the right of wives and mothers. But these Eastern women had remained unshaken. Robbed of the supporting faith of their men, they still lived out their religion in a daily self-sacrifice—love, their law, duty, their goal. Only two days since Krishna's

clinging fingers had drawn her into this hidden life, had set her feet upon the road of this great adventure. Only two days, and how many bonds she had found 'twixt herself and the little Bengali women in the shuttered house. The bond of exile, the bonds of wifehood and motherhood, the bond of a divided allegiance, a double duty, and now, the mighty burden of another's soul. And which stood first in this race for righteousness, East or West? Beatrice bowed her head.

CHAPTER IV.

“THE doctor babu comes not,” said the old chaprassi, from his post on the stairs, as Beatrice sat before her books and papers on the verandah, next day. Beatrice looked up from her reading, she had scarcely expected Surendra to appear. Coupled with yesterday’s sudden summons from the telephone, there had been signs and tokens of calamity in the air. The Sahib had been distraught and preoccupied over dinner. He had somewhat curtly ordered his wife to abstain from jungle visiting until further notice, and Beatrice, noting his anxious air, had pressed for no explanation. Indeed, explanations were unnecessary. The hasty disappearance of Surendra, the uneasy preoccupation of the Sahib, and the certainty that however stringent might be the Sahib’s orders for secrecy, the servants would oblige her with every detail at the first opportunity, rendered questions and answers superfluous. As she expected, before the servants dispersed for the night, they had informed her of the outbreak of cholera in the coolie lines. Thus, though she busied herself with her Bengali books this morning, she was not actually expecting to see Surendra.

“ Wherefore comes he not, Ram Lall ? ” she asked the chaprassi, knowing all the while the reason of Surendra’s absence, knowing equally that the chaprassi was perfectly aware of her knowledge.

“ Has the Memsahib not heard ? ” said Ram Lall, lowering his voice, and looking to right and left for possible eavesdroppers. “ Behold, there is trouble, and much sickness, even the great sickness.”

“ Is the sickness in the jungle ? ” asked Beatrice.

“ Not in the jungle, but in the cooli lines,” said the chaprassi.

“ Yet is the sickness of the cooli lines not the affair of Surendra Babu,” said Beatrice, who still lacked an odd link in the chain of her knowledge.

“ The Memsahib speaks truth,” said Ram Lall. “ The sickness in the cooli lines is not the affair of Surendra Babu. Yet, since the doctor babu of our folk is sick, who else but Surendra Babu shall the Sahib appoint in his stead ? ”

“ Then the doctor babu has the sickness ? ” said Beatrice.

“ Even so,” returned the chaprassi. “ Yesterday the doctor babu of our folk was exceeding sick, to-day he has peace, to-morrow or the next day, he will be well. For the rest, being

appointed in his stead, Surendra Babu does the work of the doctor babu. As for the Sahib, he is careful for many matters, yet to what end? Those whose death is written, how shall they not die? What is to be, that shall be. Who shall strive against fate?"

"Surendra Babu has skill," said Beatrice.

"What is skill against fate?" returned the chaprassi, comfortably. "Yet the Memsahib speaks truth, he has skill, this youth."

"Has Surendra Babu dwelt long in this jungle?" asked Beatrice.

"He has dwelt in the jungle," returned the chaprassi, "but two years."

"How came a man of his skill thus to make his dwelling in the jungle?" asked Beatrice.

"Let the Memsahib know," said the chaprassi, setting himself to the deliberate diction beloved of the Indian narrator. "Let the Memsahib know, that before Surendra Babu came to this jungle, there dwelt in that house his uncle."

"Was his uncle a doctor?" asked Beatrice.

"What else should he be but a doctor?" asked the chaprassi, as unable to contemplate other than medical predecessors for Surendra, as the descent of chickens from cows, or geese from donkeys. "His uncle also was a doctor. For the space of a year, Surendra Babu dwelt with his uncle; after a year, he died. Since he died, Surendra works in his stead."

“And when our doctor babu is ill....” began Beatrice.

“When our doctor babu is ill, then, the Sahib having appointed him, Surendra Babu works in his stead,” said Ram Lall.

“Do many go to him for treatment ?” asked Beatrice.

“Not many,” said the chaprassi. “Is he not a stranger in these parts, as also his uncle before him ? Yet, there is no other doctor, thus, of necessity, being sick, the folk of the villages seek his treatment. Moreover, there are in this factory men from his village, and from his country, these, having faith, seek his treatment.”

“And you, Ram Lall ? Do you go to Surendra Babu when you are sick ?”

“Nay, he is not of my caste nor yet of my country, how shall I have faith ?” asked Ram Lall, to whom medical skill was no matter of degrees or qualifications.

“Yet he is a passed doctor, and has knowledge,” said Beatrice, reproof in her tones.

“He is a passed doctor,” assented Ram Lall, his tones profound with unbelief. “Yet what is a pass and what is knowledge ? Does he not mix his medicines with jungle water ? How shall the strange waters of this jungle make for health ? In the time of sickness it is not good to have dealings with strangers.”

“Behold,” said a voice from lower down the stairs, “in the time of sickness it is good to have medicines from the hand of the Memsahib.”

“Even so,” assented Ram Lall, with the sidelong jerk of the head which, in the East, signifies affirmation.

“The Memsahib-folk have much knowledge,” said the voice of the khansaman from the dining-room. “Behold,” he continued, as glass-cloth in hand, he joined the party on the verandah, “in the time when Lancaster Memsahib dwelled in this house, I was sick. Very great was my fever, as also the pains of my body, so that for me there was neither peace nor sleep. Many and evil were the medicines I ate from the hand of the doctor babu, yet for me there was no peace ; as for those medicines, there was in them no profit at all. And, behold, there was in this place one of my brother-folk, a man of my own village. And when he saw that my fever remained great, and that there was no profit in the medicines of the doctor babu, then he went to the Memsahib and told her of these matters. He spake of the fever and of the pain, and told of the worthlessness of the medicines of the doctor babu. Then the Memsahib gave into the hand of my brother, two balls, small and very white, and he gave unto me and I did eat. Further, according to the order of the Memsahib, he gave unto me hot tea, and I drank. And, behold, in the twinkling

of an eye, the pain left me, and I slept. When I awoke, the fever was gone."

"Great is the knowledge of the Memsahibs," said the voice from the stairs. "I also have eaten of those white balls," said Ram Lall. "Eating those balls no pain can remain. In all sickness, they are good."

"Behold," chimed in the thin, high tones of the ayah, "have I not also eaten of the white balls? Did not the Memsahib, even this our Memsahib, give to me when there was pain in my head? Did I not eat and have peace?"

"Oh," said Beatrice, smiling, as she recognized in the magic balls Burroughs and Wellcome's aspirin tablets. "It is a good medicine," she agreed, "yet not in all sicknesses is it good."

"From the hand of the Memsahib, it is always good," asserted the khansaman.

"These doctor babu folk know nothing," was Ram Lall's conclusion of the matter. "Great is the knowledge of the Memsahibs."

"Great is the power of Faith," thought Beatrice.

Beatrice spent an anxious day. The Sahib avoided the house and had his meals sent to the office. Ram Lall reported that the sickness was not increasing, but the Sahib's continued absence was ominous. Weary of the house and of the verandah, and mindful of her husband's injunction to avoid the jungle, Beatrice had

the tea things carried out of doors, as the slanting rays of the evening sun threw the eastern side of the compound into shadow. She was preparing for yet another solitary meal, when the Sahib appeared, fresh from tub and changing. Beatrice hurried towards him, eager for news, but she had to be content with the reassurance she read in his face, for even as she greeted her husband, Ram Lall appeared, followed by a tall, burly figure, in a dusty cassock, wheeling a bicycle.

“Padre Bennett!” exclaimed Beatrice, hastening to greet her visitor.

“The same, dear lady,” returned he of the cassock, doffing a substantial solar topi, and displaying a large, benevolent countenance, with the round-eyed, hopeful expression of a careworn baby. The greying curls, wearing thin on the top, added to the padre’s likeness to a battered cherub. His appearance, together with a certain air of hesitating bustle, an atmosphere of stale business, coupled with a beaming benevolence, suggested an optimistic philanthropist, who hadn’t allowed himself time to grow up.

Padre Bennett was Chaplain of Milor Bagan, a townlet some ten miles distant from the factory, a heterogeneous collection of factories, law courts, and colleges, with a correspondingly mixed population. Padre Bennett was an optimist, an idealist, and an unwilling

bachelor. His rambling parsonage was the scene of the conception and inauguration of endless philanthropic schemes, each and all doomed to early failure, according to outsiders, by reason of their hopeless impracticability, according to Padre Bennett, for lack of the sympathetic consort, whom he had sought in vain, for the greater part of his five and forty strenuous years. He had never failed to propose to every marriageable female who had appeared in the station, for the last twenty years, whence he was known, in Milor Bagan, as the Solicitor-General. He made no secret of his ambition. "I am looking for a wife," was his customary greeting of a new acquaintance, thus, as his well-wishers pointed out, putting his quarry on their guard from the outset. Nevertheless, Padre Bennett was a general favourite. Beatrice and her husband greeted him with hearty affection.

"I passed the Hammonds on my way down," said the padre, gazing with round-eyed anxiety on Ram Lall, as that worthy laid a firm hold upon the bicycle, and wheeled it to a convenient distance. "They were in a motor car," he added.

"Then how the dickens did you pass them, on that old push bike?" demanded the Sahib.

"Oh, they had got a puncture," explained the padre. "They'll be along presently. I mentioned them, because of the tea-cups," he

added, beaming approvingly upon the tea-table.

“Of course,” said Beatrice clapping her hands. “Bring more cups,” she cried, as the khansaman appeared.

“And chairs,” suggested Padre Bennett, seating himself, and arranging an empty chair next to his own.

“I’m looking for a wife,” he murmured, as he settled the empty seat to his liking.

“Ah,” said the Sahib, looking at the empty chair.

“The Hammonds are bringing Miss Brown,” said the padre, raising his round gaze to Beatrice’s amused face.

“Oh Ho !” said the Sahib, nodding at the chair.

“Very suitable,” said the padre, patting the cushions at his side. “Earnest person, keen on.....” but here the faint toot of a distant motor horn broke in upon the conversation. A car appeared, coming along the quarter-mile of jungle road which ran behind the factory. Presently, it turned in at the gate, and drew up before the house and the expected guests alighted.

The Hammonds also hailed from Milor Bagan. Hammond was principal of a large educational institution, situated in that unsavoury locality. Of the course and aim of

“The Institute,” it is unnecessary to speak; it is sufficient to state that the students were Indians, for the most part, Hindus. Hammond formed a striking contrast to his close friend, the padre. Tall, spare, stooping, his short-sighted, quizzically sceptical expression contrasted whimsically with the round, trusting gaze of Padre Bennett. Schemes, dreams and philanthropy were to him about as congenial as beef to a Brahman. He abhorred all odours of pan and scented oils, loathed the sound of conch shells, cymbals, and all manner of Oriental rejoicing. He was as devoid of faith as a jackdaw, as full of humour as a monkey. Why he occupied his official post, was as great a mystery to him as it was an affliction. For him, the Bengali student was a freak of Nature in her most spiteful mood; the deadly cram of his educational efforts, a solemn farce, which he, Hammond, was under no obligation to reform. Fortunately, his honesty was no less than his prejudice, and he ruled his kingdom with a wooden justice, which was not unappreciated by his students. It was the Sahib’s opinion that the padre and Hammond combined would have made a very decent fellow, especially with Mrs. Hammond to direct the energies of the product of the amalgamation. As for Mrs. Hammond, she was gentle, dignified, capable, typically English, counting it for righteousness to keep herself apart from, and unspotted by, her Eastern surroundings. It was a whimsical fate

which had given her, as guest, that earnest person, Miss Brown.

Miss Brown was that modern product of cheap literature and second-hand learning, the arm-chair traveller. Earnestly convinced that it was the first duty of woman "to think," Miss Brown had spent much time and energy in profound cogitation. That she was fully equipped with the requisite mental machinery for original thinking, it did not occur to Miss Brown to doubt. As for the form and direction of her meditations, she followed a few, simple rules. Deep thinkers never think the simple thoughts of common folk, therefore it behoves deep thinkers to be critical, not to say difficult. Non-comprehending folk might call them discontented. Miss Brown described her own mental condition as "yearning," and yearned aloud and, very much. Food for thought, she culled from the least popular magazines she could find for sixpence. When she yawned over their contents, she knew she was reading deeply; when she read of the wrongs and follies and general absurdities of popular creeds and customs, Miss Brown knew herself to be on the right track. What was generally believed was sure to be false, common practice was certain to be absurd, accepted custom inevitably needed reform. But it was not enough for the really earnest thinker to disapprove on general lines, the truly keen intellect must display a bent, take up an attitude. Now,

Dame Nature had fashioned Miss Brown without bent, dent or distinguishing feature of any description. Dame Nature, it is to be feared, is an old-fashioned female of narrow prejudices. It had not occurred to Dame Nature to provide Miss Brown with any very specialized mental machinery, and it had not occurred to her that either a bent or an attitude would be necessary in the scheme of Miss Brown's simple existence. She bestowed upon Miss Brown, a short, spare form, the minimum of sandy hair, with a proportional allowance of brows and lashes, a set of indefinite features, a hazy intellect. She forgot, or neglected, to season the flavourless compound with the salt of a little humour.

A modest monetary independence, the joining of a reading society, coupled with a chance letter and present of curios from her cousin, the unfortunate Hammond, awoke the intellect and decided the bent and the attitude of Miss Brown. Cousin Hammond was in India. India furnished forth abundance of matter for criticism, mysticism, enthusiasm, indignation, and all the other sensations which Miss Brown knew she ought to experience. Forthwith, she fell to reading of India, eschewing carefully, Kipling, Mesdames Steel and Penny, and all the known authors, lest, prejudiced by their conventional notions, she should be led into regarding India from the general standpoint. Miss Brown found it a simple matter to wax indignant and original over India. She had no difficulty in

discovering literature to fan the flame of her new-lit indignation. Nourished by a material vegetarian diet, sustained by the spiritual food of innumerable 'osophies, she read and she pondered until she was certain that all flesh that was black was mystically good, and all white-skinned humanity materially and tyrannically evil. She burned and she yearned to go to the rescue of oppressed India. She longed to clasp the hand and to cheer the soul of her black brother. She was eager to display to his admiring gaze, her own personal, vegetarian, theosophical superiority to the carnivorous, conventional Cousin Hammond. She longed to subdue European tyranny, and advance Indian interests to the extreme point, which would leave Cousin Hammond, chastened and admiring, yet financially intact, in retention of that official position which was to constitute the basis of Miss Brown's benevolent activities; for Miss Brown, in common with all white-skinned friends of Indian political liberty, believed in the Divine Mission of British Rule in the East. It is impossible, unfortunately for the compatibilities of the loftiest 'osophical ideals, to imagine the British peoples content to fill the little space of their legitimate territory, the British Isles.

Miss Brown was in deadly earnest. She knew she was, because she booked a passage, secured a passport and acquired the most unprepossessing wardrobe suitable to an Eastern

campaign, and set out to visit that unsuspecting embodiment of British tyranny and Western prejudice, her Cousin Hammond. She had, so far, found Hammond all that her fancy painted him. He had furnished her with ample cause for indignation and protest. He had shown all the expected disposition to put obstacles in her path. This very visit was, in Miss Brown's opinion, a demonstration of her independence. She advanced to greet her hostess, with her customary, critical condescension. Beatrice weathered her searching gaze, with smiling equanimity, and skilfully steered her guest to the empty chair beside Padre Bennett.

"Ah, Ha! Padre," said Hammond, peering forward and noting the arrangement of chairs. "Been making hay, eh?"

Everyone laughed except Miss Brown. Mighty intellects are apt to be blind to the obvious.

"Thought I'd come on and make sure of the tea," said Padre Bennett, beaming benevolently above the cup he was handing Miss Brown.

"Hard, if after twenty years' search, old Bennett finds that," whispered Hammond to Beatrice, gazing malevolently upon his cousin.

"I didn't know you had a cousin coming out," said Beatrice.

"Neither did I, till I saw her," returned Hammond, bitterly.

"The padre tells us she is an earnest person," said the Sahib.

"She is," said Mrs. Hammond, sighing.

"The worst possible, earnest brand," said Hammond viciously.

"She has the weirdest ideas about natives," said Mrs. Hammond, lowering her voice.

"Wants to fraternize with my students," said Hammond.

"Hum-m...." said the Sahib. "With what results?"

"At present," said Hammond, complacently, "she is engaged in a strenuous study of Hindustani as a medium of communication."

There was a general laugh, which died away as the padre's voice rose in earnest argument above their merriment.

"But, my dearest lady, I assure you, all those young men speak fluent, if foreign English, there need be no difficulty...."

"But I wish to converse with them in their mother-tongue," came the superior accents of Miss Brown. "I am assured that East and West can only meet...."

"Through the medium of the vernaculars," finished Padre Bennett, only too delighted to mount a new hobby. "Excellent! Excellent!"

"I swore she must learn the vernaculars," said Hammond, complacently. "Kept her out of mischief so far."

“Does she learn fast?” asked Beatrice.

“Knows a deuced sight too much ever to learn anything,” returned Hammond cheerfully. “Oh, ye gods! Listen to that perjured padre!”

“But the vernacular of Bengal is not Hindustani,” Padre Bennett was saying, cheerfully. “Either you must content yourself with conversing only with English-speaking natives....”

“Oh, blow the padre and his English-speaking natives!” muttered Hammond, striving, by facial contortions, to arrest the flow of the padre’s information.

“Or,” continued the unconscious padre, “you must make yourself familiar with Bengali.” “Oh!” said Miss Brown, doubtfully.

“Yes,” said the padre, diving into his pockets. “Here is a specimen of the character. A bit crabbed at first sight,” he admitted, as he displayed a page of the spidery hieroglyphics which constitute the Bengali script, “but nothing to an earnest student. Besides, my dear lady, you have the advantage of being in the country. You can hear the spoken tongue all round you. It is the chance of a lifetime. No arm-chair cram, but a life-study of both people and language.”

“But how am I to find a teacher?” objected Miss Brown, who infinitely preferred arm-chair methods.

“I’ll send you a teacher to-morrow,” said Padre Bennett, cheerfully. “The real thing.”

"Dhoti, hair-oil, pan, and knocking knees," whispered Hammond. "By Jove! the padre's going to prove my best friend."

"I begged her to make friends with the Sens, and Westernized families like them, if she must run after natives," said Mrs. Hammond plaintively.

"Not she!" growled Hammond. "She imagines herself, dying to sit on the floor, gabbling a black bát and eating with her fingers."

"And the great thing for practice," came Padre Bennett's emphatic tones, "is to hear services, vernacular services. Go to a daily service and try to understand what you hear. At first you understand nothing, then...."

"But I don't know any native churches," objected Miss Brown, whose chief contribution to other people's enthusiasms was apt to be the discovery of difficulties.

"I'll take you myself," said the obliging padre, "we'll go this very evening."

"But....but...." stammered Miss Brown. "Is it sanitary? Will there be punkahs? Do any other Europeans go?"

"Nothing European at all. No barriers of any description, not even benches," the padre assured her. "You sit on your heels, and kneel on the simple mud floor. I'll show you. I'm sure," admiringly, "you'll do it beautifully."

“ Oh, Great ! Great ! ” choked Hammond from his retreat behind Beatrice’s chair. “ The padre is a special Providence.”

“ But ” began Miss Brown.

“ Not at all ! Not at all ! ” bustled Padre Bennett, consulting pocket-book and watch. “ We’ll go to-night. In fact, we’ll go at once. I’ll borrow our hostess’s bicycle.”

He gave a hurried order to the hovering Ram Lall, who, with that instinctive appreciation of a situation, only acquired by long study of facial expression, hurried to obey the padre’s commands. That worthy cleric, seizing Miss Brown by the arm, bustled her off. She turned an imploring gaze on the studiously averted countenance of the perjured Hammond, but the padre saw neither appeal nor disregard, and bore her off to squat on her heels, and prepare, in lowly incomprehension of a vernacular service, for the lofty mission of reforming India.

“ Fine ! ” said Hammond, as they watched the two bikes disappear along the jungle road. “ If he keeps that up, he’ll marry her, poor chap. But mark my words, he’ll cure her, on the homœopathic principle.”

“ ‘ Like cures like, ’ eh ? ” asked the Sahib.

“ Something of the sort. Still, I wish he hadn’t said quite so much about the English-speaking abilities of my students.”

"She'll be too busy learning Bengali to meddle with your students," suggested Beatrice.

"Not she," said Hammond, "she'll never learn anything. Beats me, how anyone ever got in enough words edgeways to teach her to read. Well, we shall be able to exchange a few sentences going home, shan't we, my dear?" turning to his wife.

Mrs. Hammond smiled, "I think we had better follow Miss Brown," she said, "she may need succour."

"May need Keating's" said Hammond, with relish. "Heavens! What a sportsman old Bennett is, after all!"

"Come along," said Mrs. Hammond, taking her husband's arm, "Mrs. Weston is longing to get rid of us, Mr. Weston looks tired to death."

"So you do, old man," said Hammond, peering critically at his friend.

"What's wrong? You've got no cousins in your cupboard."

Weston laughed, and looked mischievously at Beatrice. "Hum-m!" he said, "the Memsahib here is studying Bengali and acquiring a jungle visiting list."

"What!" exclaimed Hammond, "Oh, Memsahib, Memsahib! I hadn't thought this of you!" "Better nip it in the bud, Weston."

"Not a bit of it!" said the Sahib pressing his wife's arm. "A memsahib in the jungle wants her hobbies. Can't have her moping."

"But why not something suitable? Music now, or a little sketching?" suggested Mrs. Hammond.

"Oh, I want something human," said Beatrice.

"Human!" cried Mrs. Hammond. "But you don't call these natives human?"

"Hear the concentrated wisdom of many Anglo-Indian ancestors!" laughed Hammond. "Wouldn't that observation sound well as a question in the House! You're the kind that rides in tumbrils and swings from *lanternes*, my dear. Too bright and good for a radical world. Reserve these decent truths for friendly ears, I beg of you. All the same, Mrs. Weston, I implore you, pause and consider."

"Oh, I'm not a Miss Brown," smiled Beatrice. "But you haven't told us your news, dear," turning to her husband.

"Oh, the trouble is scotched for the time being," said the Sahib, puffing contentedly at his cheroot.

"Trouble? What trouble?" asked Hammond.

"Cholera," said Weston, briefly.

"Much?" asked Hammond.

“ It didn’t get beyond the coolie lines,” said the Sahib.

“ Is the doctor babu better ? ” asked Beatrice.

“ What ! You’ve had your doctor babu down ! ” exclaimed Hammond. “ Have you had to be Medicus then ? ”

“ Sheer good luck that the doctor babu was down,” returned Hammond. “ Thanks to your friend Surendra, my dear,” turning to Beatrice, “ we’ve only lost one life.”

“ That’s good,” said Hammond.

“ Yes, he rolled up with the apparatus for saline injections,” continued the Sahib, “ knew how to use it too. I never could get my own doctor to attempt the treatment.”

“ And who is Surendra, apart from his friendship with the Memsahib ? ” demanded Hammond, shaking a disapproving head at Beatrice.

“ He’s a local practitioner,” returned the Sahib, “ quite a young fellow, but good, remarkably good.”

“ And where do you come in, Memsahib ? ” demanded Hammond.

“ Oh, the Memsahib has appointed him household professor of Bengali,” said the Sahib easily.

Hammond shook his head.

"She has got his wife on her visiting list and his small son haunts the gate," added the Sahib, enjoying the consternation of Mrs. Hammond.

"My dear!" exclaimed that lady. "How can you? You'll catch something."

"You'd catch something if you were my wife," nodded Hammond.

"Wives being more vulnerable than cousins?" asked Beatrice.

"Other people's wives are easily prescribed for," chuckled the Sahib. "However, I don't want Surendra's head swelled, as I mean to secure his services permanently, if he'll come in as Works Doctor."

"Oh, he'll come in," said Hammond, scornfully. "He'll come in, and bring his swollen head with him. What with his performances as *locum*, and the Memsahib's attentions, his head must be in an advanced stage of development already. Mark my words, Weston, he'll do no good, you'll get nothing out of this but ingratitude."

"I'm not looking for gratitude," said Weston impatiently, "I'm merely trying to bag a good doctor."

"Oh well, bag him! Get all you can out of him, but let your husband's babus alone, Mrs. Weston."

"How can you, Mrs. Weston!" said Mrs. Hammond again. "And how do you manage

at these lessons ? Do you actually permit him to sit down in your presence ? ”

“ Well she can’t provide him with a pulpit or keep him prostrate at her feet, can she ? ” laughed Hammond. “ You’ll grace a tumbril in some future revolution yet, my dear.”

“ No, no ! she’s the reincarnation of a decapitated Marquise,” laughed Beatrice, slipping her arm through that of her friend.

“ Well, I’m not riding in a tumbril to-night,” said Mrs. Hammond, moving towards her car. “ And really, I should prefer a tumbril to a seat in a Bengali house,” she added, as she settled herself on the cushions.

“ I’m sure you would,” chuckled Hammond. “ Well trained,” he said, nodding at Beatrice. “ Go thou and do likewise, Weston.”

“ Remember the cousin in the cupboard ! ” said Beatrice, as the car moved off.

“ Better a cousin in the cupboard than a wife in the office,” called back Hammond.

“ All the same, little woman, I don’t want Surendra’s head swelled,” said the Sahib, as the car vanished along the jungle road.

“ And I shouldn’t like to feel like Mrs. Hammond,” returned Beatrice.

“ Nor I ! ” laughed her husband. “ She’s an anachronism ! charming, but certainly an anachronism ! ”

CHAPTER V.

HOWEVER, the complications feared by the Sahib, and the catastrophies predicted by Hammond, proved but bogies, for, to Weston's discomfiture, Surendra curtly refused the appointment to the Works. He gave no explanation of his refusal, other than his preference for independent practice. His manner was curt and awkward, the Sahib felt rebuffed and annoyed. He suggested to his wife, the possibility that Surendra might be more communicative in the course of the Bengali lessons. But Surendra was equally reserved with the Memsahib; he volunteered no comment on the situation, and, in reply to her questions, merely repeated that he preferred to remain independent.

"How is your wife?" asked Beatrice, by way of changing the subject, and was immediately convinced that she had offended beyond hope of pardon.

"Well!" said Surendra shortly, with the affirmatory sidelong jerk of the head.

"Showing favour, make me to know," said Beatrice, shyly; "is there offence in the mention of a wife to a Hindu?"

"No offence," said Surendra smiling.

"It seems to me," said Beatrice, musingly, "I have heard that to speak of these matters in the ears of a Hindu, makes for offence."

"No, no," said Surendra, his dark face lighting with interest, "you speak of a Musulman custom. It is true that to a Musulman there is, in the mention of his women-folk, offence. With my people it is not so."

"Then I may speak of your wife?" asked Beatrice.

"It will be an honour," returned Surendra.

"In that I entered your house, for that was there offence?" pursued Beatrice.

"None whatever," returned Surendra, but he gave no invitation to repeat the visit.

"Yet Hindu women are purdah, are they not?"

"They are purdah," assented Surendra, "yet that also is not the ancient custom of Hindustan, but a Musulman custom."

"Not a Hindu custom!" exclaimed Beatrice.

"In nowise," returned Surendra. Clearly Padre Bennett was not the only rider of hobbies. His face alight with interest, Surendra proceeded to give his views of the history and development of the purdah system. In the good old times, before the Musulman conquest, Indian women were as free as their European sisters of to-day. In the very book the Memsahib was reading, the history of Sita, she would see that there was

no mention of purdah or of the seclusion of women. She would read of the freedom of women in the choice of husbands.

"But," said Beatrice puzzled, "why copy the Musulmans, whom you hate?"

"After the coming of the Musulmans, Hindu women were, of necessity, secluded," explained Surendra, gravely.

"But surely in these days, there is no danger from Musulmans," said Beatrice incredulously.

"No danger, possibly," said Surendra doubtfully, "but it is become a custom."

"Yet it is not a matter of religion?" asked Beatrice.

"The purdah is in nowise a matter of the ancient Hindu religion," returned Surendra, "yet it is become a custom."

"But what do you yourself think of the matter?" urged Beatrice. "As a doctor, do you think it good for the health of women for them to be thus made prisoners?"

"For my own part," said Surendra, evidently mounted upon a congenial hobby, "I would see women free. I have no objection. Often have I spoken with my friends on the matter, saying, 'You have followed Musulman custom and made your women prisoners; now, following English custom, set them free.' Thus have I spoken with my friends."

“ Then is your wife free ? ” asked Beatrice.

The light died out of Surendra's eyes, his face took on, again, its mask-like expression. “ My wife is purdah,” he said shortly.

Beatrice thought of her husband's remark to Hammond, *re* prescriptions for other peoples' wives, and wisely made no comment on the discrepancies of preaching and practice.

“ Your wife told me, she had more freedom in her own village,” said Beatrice thoughtfully.

The light returned to Surendra's face, remounting his hobby, off he went again. “ In our own villages, the advantages of the women-folk are many,” he said, and forthwith he described the pleasant freedom of the life of Hindu women, in villages free from the dreaded Musulman. He told of the morning visit to the bathing ghât, the gatherings and discussions at those resorts, the friendly excursions to the village wells and temples, the festivities of the puja seasons, the visits to and from female friends.

“ And yet your wife never goes out ? ” asked Beatrice.

Again that mask-like expression, “ She never goes out,” repeated Surendra.

“ If in my question, there be offence, show favour, and pardon,” said Beatrice.

“ Yet tell me, since she can thus go abroad in your own village, and since you fear for her

health, why must she remain shut up, in this place ? ”

Surendra hesitated. “ She has many duties,” he said at length.

“ But the women of your own village, have they no duties ? ” demanded Beatrice.

Surendra moved uneasily in his seat.

“ Do I offend ? ” asked Beatrice.

“ No, no, in nowise,” he assured her, again all smiling courtesy. “ It is true that I, myself, have no objection to the freedom of women,” he continued, “ but that my wife should walk on foot in these roads, that is not fitting.”

“ Yet Sita walked with Ram in the forest,” said Beatrice.

“ There are many Musulmans in this place,” said Surendra irrelevantly.

“ Yet if you walked with your wife,” suggested Beatrice.

For the first time, Surendra looked genuinely shocked. “ That is not our custom,” he expostulated.

“ Yet if you wish to follow English customs,” suggested Beatrice. “ If you wish to see your women free....”

“ I would see women free,” said Surendra. “ Yet to walk with them, we do not wish for that....” he broke off in confusion.

"Customs cannot be broken at will," said Beatrice, kindly.

"Customs cannot be broken at will," he agreed, eagerly, evidently feeling himself released from a tight place.

"Perhaps your wife fears scandal," suggested Beatrice.

"True," he agreed. "There would be scandal. The custom of this place is strict. If my wife should break these customs, the women of this place would cry shame upon her. "Further," he added, "there would be for me no patients."

"True," said Beatrice, thoughtfully. "Customs are hard to break," she said again.

"Customs are hard to break," he repeated.

"Yet I may visit your wife?" asked Beatrice.

"You would visit my wife?" he asked, smiling.

"Without doubt," returned Beatrice, "shall I come?"

"Come," said Surendra, briefly, with the sidelong head-jerk.

"To give annoyance to your wife, that is far from my wish," said Beatrice. "Except your wife send me an invitation, I will not come."

"The coming of the Memsahib to our poor house," said Surendra, gravely courteous, "is for us a very great honour. By coming, you show

us favour indeed. Yet by reason of a poor reception, I am afraid."

"Have no fear," smiled Beatrice, "the reception of gentle folk can only be good."

Surendra's face lit up with a gratified smile. "The house is poor and wretched," he said, "it is but a dwelling place, it is not our home."

"In nowise," said Beatrice, gathering that contradiction was expected of her. "Further, I have seen your house," she reminded him.

"I know," smiled Surendra.

"My coming was the work of the little Krishna," said Beatrice.

"When will you come?" asked Surendra, melting at the name of Krishna.

"When I receive from the hand of your wife an invitation," said Beatrice, "then will I come."

"The Memsahib shows us much favour," said Surendra, his face a mask, his accents cold, yet his satisfaction plainly apparent.

Surendra had not been long gone when Ram Lall appeared with a note. It was the invitation from Surendra's wife. The Bengali character was written with a painstaking clearness, which was evidently a concession to the ignorance of the recipient. Beatrice read it with little difficulty. It was a prim little epistle, respectfully cordial. It was signed Binodini Rai. Beatrice wrote her acceptance and despatched it by Ram Lall.

Krishna was waiting at the gate, as Beatrice set out to pay her visit on the following afternoon. No doubt about *his* views as to her welcome. He ran towards her with a joyful shout, which the recollection of social obligation checked abruptly. "Namashkar," he said, bowing low. "Are you well?" he added, as he smiled up at the Memsahib, from under the arch of his joined hands.

"Is your mother well?" asked Beatrice, as she returned the greeting.

"She is well," said Krishna. "Come, you are coming to our house."

"I am coming," said Beatrice, surrendering her hand to his clasp.

Her reception at Krishna's home was exactly as on the occasion of her previous visit. A voice from the shuttered window facing the road bade her enter, and she was met at the door of the inner courtyard by Krishna's mother. There was a pile of closely written manuscript on the book-laden table.

"My husband writes much," said Binodni, noting Beatrice's curious glance at the table.

"Concerning what matters does he write?" asked Beatrice.

"He writes stories, as also of medical matters," replied the little wife, her tone studiously indifferent, but pride sparkling in her dark eyes.

“Stories !” exclaimed Beatrice.

“My husband writes many stories,” said Binodini complacently.

“Does he publish them ?” asked Beatrice.

“From time to time, he sends them to a monthly paper,” returned the wife, mentioning a well-known Bengali publication.

“Does he receive much money for his writings ?” asked Beatrice, curiously. The little wife shook her head. “He seldom takes money,” she returned. “For love of the work he writes, he has no care for gain. He spends much time thus.”

Beatrice sat silent. Who could have perceived in the awkward, taciturn young babu, a budding author. “For this reason, he accepts not the appointment at the hand of the Sahib !” she exclaimed, half to herself.

“By reason of his refusal, was the Sahib angry ?” asked Binodini anxiously.

Beatrice hesitated between the actual truth and the consciousness that the Sahib had no moral justification for wrath.

“The Sahib was disappointed,” she said slowly.

“Let not the Sahib visit his anger upon my husband,” said Binodini, anxiously. “Let the Memsahib know that the heart of my husband is set upon writing. For this reason he dwells in the jungle, and is content with little gain.”

“ Because of his writing, he came to the jungle ? ” asked Beatrice.

“ For that alone, no,” returned Binodini. “ In the time of my husband’s youth, my father-in-law was exceeding sick, and with him rupees were scarce. For this reason, the brother of my father-in-law, my husband’s uncle, he who dwelled in this house before him, took my husband and gave for his education rupees ; further, he took him into his house, and when he died the house and patients were my husband’s property.”

“ And this uncle, was he also a scholar ? ” asked Beatrice.

“ He also read much, and from time to time he wrote,” returned Binodini.

“ Did he also write stories ? ” asked Beatrice.

“ Not stories, but of medical matters, he wrote,” said Binodini. “ He, also, had little care for rupees.”

“ But your husband, he would win fame ? ” asked Beatrice.

“ It may be,” assented Binodini, smiling.

“ And for this reason, he would walk free ? ”

Binodini’s face clouded, clearly she feared to offend the local powers. “ Let not the Memsahib make anger,” she said pleadingly. “ If my husband took a service, except he made neglect of duty, how could he have, for his writing, leisure ? And to neglect duty,” said Binodini simply, “ that is for my husband, impossible.”

"Yet the pay is not small, there would be drofit," suggested Beatrice.

Binodini smiled. "In my husband's eyes, profit is nought," she returned, shaking her veiled head. "Further, in his family no man has ever taken a service, all have walked free."

"Are they Zamindars [land-holders]?" asked Beatrice.

"They are not Zamindars," explained Binodini. "They are of the Baidya caste. From ancient times, they have been physicians. My father-in-law and all his sons, as also his brothers before them, they are all doctors."

"And of them, none takes a service?" asked Beatrice, surprised.

"None," returned Binodini.

"Do they all work in your own village?" asked Beatrice, puzzled.

"No," replied Binodini. "Of all my husband's brothers, only one now dwells at home. He works in the company of my father-in-law, for my father-in-law is old, and does little work."

"How many sons has your father-in-law?"

"He has four sons," said Binodini. "One works with my father-in-law, one is a doctor in the city, these twain make to go the household affairs of the home."

"Your husband, speaking with me, said this house was not his home," said Beatrice, absently.

“ True,” said Binodini. “ This house is but a dwelling place, it is a poor place,” she added, disparagingly. “ The house of my father-in-law, that is our home,” she explained.

“ Ah yes,” said Beatrice, “ I remember, you live in joint-families. Yet your husband walks free.”

Binodini looked grave. “ It is true he walks free, further, he sends not to his home, each month, rupees, after the manner of his brothers. Yet, at the time of the death of his uncle, then he sent much money, all his uncle’s savings, thus, he now goes free. Yet, should there be in my father-in-law’s house need, then would my husband send rupees. Such is our custom and our religion.”

“ We have heard,” said the lady of the wheaten skin, “ that the Sahibs give not to their parents to eat.”

“ Is that a true saying ? ” asked Binodini anxiously.

“ In part,” said Beatrice smiling. “ When our parents have need, then we give.”

“ Is it, in truth, not the custom or the religion of the Sahibs, to give to their parents to eat ? ”

“ Except there be need,” said Beatrice, “ there is no custom, neither is it a matter of religion.”

The little women looked pained.

“ Even in their old age, do the Sahibs not give to eat to their parents ? ” asked the fair lady, after a disapproving pause.

“ When there is need, without doubt, we give,” said Beatrice.

“ Yet, month by month, as the Sahibs receive their earnings, they give not ? ” pressed the sister-in-law.

“ It is not a fixed custom,” said Beatrice.

“ And Krishna,” she asked, by way of changing the subject, “ does he go to school ? ”

“ He does not go to school,” said his mother. “ His father himself gives him teaching. For that reason also, it is not his wish to take a service.”

All this time, the small daughter of the lady of the wheaten countenance had kept her big eyes fixed on the Memsahib’s face, with an expression of searching inquiry. “ Oh, what are you ? ” she exclaimed, breaking her long silence. “ Are you a male ? ”

“ Chi ! Chi ! ” exclaimed her mother, reprovingly.

“ Why does she ask that ? ” laughed Beatrice.

“ Let the Memsahib take not offence,” said Binodini, apologetically. “ For that you walk with the head uncovered, for this reason she cannot understand.”

“ Oh,” said Beatrice, gazing comprehendingly at the veiled heads of the Bengali women, “ by

reason of my uncovered head, she asks what I am ? ”

“ Even so,” returned Binodini, somewhat reassured by her guest’s amused smile.

“ Tell me,” repeated the child, encouraged by the Memsahib’s smile, “ are you a male ? ”

“ Neither male nor female,” returned Beatrice gaily, “ a Memsahib.”

“ A Memsahib,” repeated the child, turning wise eyes on her mother, “ thus, neither male nor female.”

“ And you never go out to eat the air ? ” said Beatrice, returning to the subject of her recent discussion with Surendra.

“ In this country, there is little opportunity,” answered Binodini, evidently prepared for the question.

“ But what is your wish ? ” asked Beatrice, “ surely it is not to your benefit to remain thus prisoners in the house.”

“ It is our custom,” said Binodini, smiling.

“ In our own country, the custom is not thus grievous,” nodded the fair lady.

“ Can you not come to my house ? ” asked Beatrice.

The faces of the two women lit up.

“ We can come,” said Binodini. “ But the Sahib....”

“ I will make a bandobast with the Sahib,” said Beatrice, smiling. And so it was arranged, but only to be squashed by Surendra, whose bold theories seemed to be more than balanced by the extreme narrowness of his practice.

It was dusk when Beatrice bade her friends farewell. The crimson of sunset was deepening to purple, as she entered the verandah, where the Sahib was extended in a long chair, contentedly puffing at a cheroot. Beatrice sank into a chair beside his, and in sympathetic silence, they watched nature’s nightly transformation scene. The deep red of the sky, smoke streaked, cloud flecked, softened to purple, which deepened and darkened, until night dropped her mysterious veil over the sordid scenery of the day. One by one, the lights twinkled out from the buildings across the river, until they stood revealed,—the fairy palaces of the hours of darkness. The river, velvet black under the canopy of night, held her dark mirror to the blazing buildings, and sparkled, silver-splashed, with borrowed splendour. Beatrice rested her head beside her husband’s and sighed contentedly. “ If only the night could stay,” she quoted.

“ Leeds in the day, Venice at night,” replied the Sahib, gazing out at the river. “ And where have you been ? Visiting again ? ”

“ Oh ! I expect you have had a full account of my doings,” returned Beatrice, and she gave

him a summary of her conversation with Binodini.

“Just like these Bengalis,” was the Sahib’s comment on Surendra’s literary ambitions. “Greedy, grasping, idle when bad ; dreamy, garrulous, unpractical at the best. All the same, I wish Surendra had chosen otherwise.”

“Wish who had chosen otherwise ?” said Hammond’s voice, as that gentleman appeared on the verandah, followed by the disapproving Ram Lall, who announced, in tones full of decorous reproof, the Sahib, who with indecorous haste, preceded the customary herald, “Hammond Sahib.”

“Who should have chosen otherwise ?” he repeated, as he took a seat, proffered by Ram Lall.

“Surendra Babu,” returned Weston.

“And who may Surendra Babu be ?” demanded Hammond.

“The young doctor babu who saw us through the cholera,” said Weston.

“Ah, ha ! the fellow whose head Mrs. Weston was inflating,” said Hammond, turning a disapproving eye upon Beatrice. “Well, what now ? What has he done ? Decamped with the stores ? Killed above his licence ? Cheeked the Sahib ? Let me know the worst.”

“He has done nothing at all,” said Weston quietly. “He has refused the appointment.”

“ Didn’t I tell you so ! ” exclaimed Hammond.

“ No, you didn’t,” said Weston.

“ You said he’d accept, fast enough,” Beatrice reminded him.

“ I said he’d get a badly swollen head,” said Hammond. “ So he has. Even I didn’t dream it would swell him up to a contempt for a good job.”

“ Doesn’t want to lose his independence,” said Weston.

“ Doesn’t want to settle to regular work,” returned Hammond. “ Take my tip, leave him to simmer gently in his own natural juices, and mark my words, within three months, he’ll come cringing and drivelling, and begging for the very job he’s so highty-tighty about now. It’s simply a dodge to get more pay.”

“ Think so ? ” said Weston.

“ Certain of it,” said Hammond.

“ His wife gave me a different reason,” said Beatrice.

“ His wife ! ” said Hammond, in tones of disgust. “ See here, Mrs. Weston ! You let these natives alone. As for this fellow’s wife, you’ll do no good to her either. All you’ll do will be to get her into scrapes. Ten to one, your friend Surendra will end by exerting his surgical skill to the extent of cutting off her nose. I wish to Heaven English women would

leave natives to men ! ” he finished, and subsided into a bitter silence.

“ Cousin emerging from her cupboard again ? ” asked Weston, sympathetically.

Hammond sighed, and launched into an indignant account of the doings of the misguided Miss Brown. That lady, thanks to Padre Brown’s ill-judged information, was pursuing her experiments upon the persons of Hammond’s English-speaking students. She had sent cards for an “ At Home ” all round the Institute. Certain adventurous spirits, privately obnoxious to Hammond, had accepted gaily, dragging with them a number of scared youths of orthodox principles. She had pressed refreshments upon the advanced and careless, and upon the shrinking orthodox, with indiscriminating hospitality. She had demanded their approval of a meatless menu, with egg sandwiches in particular, as a demonstration of her own particular sympathy with their vegetarian diet, waxing sorely offended at the indignant refusal of her hospitality by the outraged orthodox. She knew far too much about Hindu customs, was infinitely too full of sympathetic understanding of caste prejudices, to perceive the enormity of introducing an orthodox Brahman into a room defiled by the presence of hen’s eggs. As for the students, some had fled the Institute. Some had besieged Hammond with complaints, and demands for protection. Others sulked apart, perceiving a Government policy for the certain humiliation

of Hindus and the possible exaltation of Muslims. A few local badmashes took advantage of the situation to haunt Hammond's quarters, in the character of Miss Brown's followers and admirers. The only ray of sunshine on Hammond's horizon was the energy and consistency with which Padre Bennett continued to propel Miss Brown along the path of Oriental investigation. He had, himself, hammered into her unwilling brain the Bengali alphabet; he had, himself, presented to her horrified eyes the dread confusion of that muddled multitude of hieroglyphics, the combined characters. He had made her mornings dreadful with scripts and spellings, and jaw-cracking straining after nasal utterances. He had made her evenings hideous with bustling bicycle rides in quest of vernacular Christian services. He let no opportunity for precept or practice pass neglected. Did they perceive two crones quarrelling in the road, he forthwith arrested his pupil's progress, and bade her repeat to him such of the elevating conversation as her disgusted ears could catch. Did he drag her, shrinking, into a tram, he obligingly construed, word by word, and in no uncertain voice, such scraps of dialogue as caught his ear, cheerfully explaining the supposed enthusiasms and ambitions of his companion to his interested neighbours. Compulsory attendance at native Christian services, he exacted daily. It was Hammond's belief that he didn't scruple to dump Miss Brown

forcibly, upon her unwilling heels, after the manner of an Indian M. C. in the conduct of native ceremonies.

"And how did Miss Brown take all this?" the Westons asked, much amused.

"Miss Brown," returned Hammond, "had no chance whatever of doing anything but submit. Knowledge was simply forced upon her. Padre Brown heard neither her protests nor her laments. He had got it firmly into his head that she wished to study Indian vernaculars and native life, and he had assumed the mission of ramming vernaculars down her shuddering throat, and dragging her shivering person through a series of typically odoriferous, bare, brown, dusty experiences. Verily, in the meeting of Padre Bennett and Miss Brown, a just Nemesis had accomplished a righteous recompense for impious presumption."

"Poor Miss Brown!" said Beatrice, faintly, as she wiped away the hysterical tears of helpless laughter.

"My only fear," gasped Weston, equally convulsed, "is for the poor old padre."

"Well, after all, it is the usual case of going through the wood and picking up a crooked stick," said Hammond, callously. "Besides, fate owes him something for backing such whimsies at all. *He didn't play the game,*" said Hammond darkly.

“And how do Miss Brown’s studies progress?” asked Beatrice. “She must be getting quite an Oriental scholar.”

“Miss Brown,” said Hammond bitterly, “is far too busy, holding forth on the wilful ignorance of European residents in India, to have any space in her noddle for the reception of information. If she was bound with the most erudite Oriental pages in the *Encyclopædia Britannica*, I’d still back her to keep her mental record unspotted by the least tittle of knowledge.” Hammond rose to go.

“Now, my dear lady,” said he, as he took Beatrice’s hand, “be advised, let babus alone. You are much too charming for such work. Well,” as Beatrice shook her head, “look out for trouble,” and he followed Ram Lall down the staircase.

CHAPTER VI.

IT was ten of the morning, the long verandah was pleasantly warmed by the genial sun, and fresh with the bracing breeze of a Bengal December. The half-drawn chiks (sunblinds) shut out the sordid scenery of the opposite river bank, yet gave a glimpse, through the verandah railings, of the brown water of the river, lit to bronze, kissed into smiles by the morning sun, and rippled into golden wavelets by the north breeze. The breeze stirred the pages of a letter in Beatrice's hand. The letter was from Alice Lancaster, and came, as Alice's letters had a knack of coming, at a time of need. Beatrice read eagerly, certain of comfort, hopeful for guidance. She had come, so it seemed to her anxious mind, to the end of a blind alley in her Bengali adventure. Surendra remained reserved and on his guard, the projected visit of the little women had been postponed again and again. There was always forthcoming some plausible excuse either of health or duty, but Beatrice felt that there was some key to the puzzle that she lacked. Now, she looked for the clue to the difficulty in Alice Lancaster's letter.

"So you have come to a deadlock in the Great Adventure," wrote Alice. "You have

encountered your first real stumbling block, and already there are not wanting pointing fingers and derisive tongues. Take heart, you are not the first to be laughed to scorn. Now is the time for faith. And what is faith? How few people have a right understanding of this much-tortured term! For myself, I owe, what I know by experience to be the one, true, workable definition of faith, to an obscure Welsh parson. If he still lives, he knows nothing of my existence. If he has passed over, may he be reaping a rich reward for the lifelong joy he planted in my heart, one Spring Sunday, thirty years ago. It was in the days of my early married life, and during one of those little foretastes of Heaven that intersperse this Indian life of dread anxieties and aching separations. After a peculiarly anxious separation, a time of much sickness and uncertainty, my husband had joined me in England, and we were indulging in our favourite holiday of a driving tour. It was before these restless days of motoring, we travelled but slowly, with horses. After a week's leisurely progress through the glorious scenery of North Wales, we came, one Saturday evening, to a little village, and there put up for the night. It was a favourite resort of our family, and we received a warm welcome from Mrs. Rees, the family landlady. It is seldom that one returns to a beloved spot, after an absence of years, to find no friends missing and all well, but that special week-end seemed

one golden progress of glad meetings. Every one was well, there were no gaps, and, oh, for those peaceful times! in those days there was neither war nor rumour of war. We inquired for the doctor, the school-master, the post-master, 'Oh yess! they were there.' The parson? 'Oh yess! he was there.'

"Now, the parson of this village was one of the jokes of our young people. Tall, burly, and apparently strong and hearty, he rejoiced in the most dour expression, and delivered himself of the most vinegary eloquence it has ever been my lot to hear from a pulpit. Not that his discourses were depressing or without profit, they were not. But oh, how poor was his estimate of humanity! How sourly scathing his indictments thereon! Their profit was that of a smart mustard plaster. I was curious to see this clerical phenomenon again, yet half reluctant to have the dour stream of his eloquence poured upon the bliss of my golden week. Imagine my surprise, when, on the Sunday morning, above the pulpit rail, there appeared a face beaming with kindness, alight and alive with love. I have forgotten his text, indeed I suspect that I missed it in my absorbed speculations as to the cause of this wonderful change. My attention was recalled from my musings by the clarion call of the words, 'Faith is the love that takes a risk.' No, do not lay down my letter in alarm, that is all I remember of the sermon. Yet the words of that obscure Welsh

padre, as my life's motto, have come ringing down the years. In many a time of doubt they have convinced and reassured, in many a cloud of perplexity they have lightened and cheered. Always when discouraged and derided, often when the absurd inadequacy of my own attempts to live up to my precepts has well-nigh crushed all the strength and the life from my spirit, I have heard yet again the echo of the clear clarion voice in the half-filled church, that bygone Spring Sunday, 'Faith is the love that takes a risk.' It has come as the solution of many a difficulty, as the decision of many a problem, it has roused from sins of apathy. Always it has stiffened and cheered. May God bless and reward that burly padre. I cannot tell you more of his story. I have often wondered what caused the early pessimism, and from what ordeal of fire sprang the glorious change. Often have I pondered on the nature of the risk by which he won that fine faith, but all I know is, that God led me aside that Spring Sabbath and gave me, from those unconscious lips, the great gift of my life. Share it with me, Beatrice, freely I received, let me as freely give.

"And now, in the light of this risk-running faith, let us tackle these stumbling blocks in your present path. Surendra's present attitude is indeed discouraging, still I think you may safely attribute his gaucheries to shyness. His curtness probably arises from his consciousness of your displeasure and disappointment at his refusal

of the factory appointment. The Bengali's reserve, and disposition to give evasive and false reasons for his actions, you may invariably attribute to his conviction, that his real motives are beyond the pale of Western understanding. I have found the best attitude, that which a wise woman applies to a shy baby. Ignore Surendra's embarrassment, and it will vanish. Ask him for neither explanation nor particulars, and he will volunteer both. As for the fibs, I have made it a practice to receive them with an expression of bland incomprehension and an interrogative silence. My experience in these situations has been that a Bengali searches one's face for the effect of his words. So long as one's face remains blank, he varies and improves his story, until, into the twisted tale, there creeps a suggestion of the truth, when a timely hint, coupled with a gleam of intelligence upon one's hitherto blank countenance, will often produce the desired facts.

In this case, you have met with the most common experience. Surendra has told you no fibs. On the other hand, he has judged, not incorrectly, that the Sahib is unlikely to anticipate, or to sympathize with, the literary ambitions of a penurious babu. No doubt he has been burning to confide in you ; but was he altogether wrong in assuming that you would probably think his ambitions inconsistent if not absurd ? A dhoti-draped babu, squatting, pen in hand, over the composition of Bengali fiction,

sacrificing thereto good prospects of solid income and European favour! How must Surendra expect that to appear to the Sahib? Remember that the Bengali babu knows perfectly well that he is, in the main, ridiculous in the eyes of the average Sahib. As you come to know these people better, you will learn how intensely sensitive they are to ridicule. Can you wonder that they guard by any means, false or true, their cherished aspirations? Thanks to the little wife, you have, in the main, an idea of the true explanation of Surendra's anxiety for his independence. But not for a moment do I suppose that you are acquainted with all the circumstances. No Bengali lives unto himself. The patriarchal home is the root and the goal of his existence. The needs and demands of the joint-family determine every step and action. True, Surendra seems peculiarly independent, but you will find that even in his case the ancestral home, in some primitive village, influences him at every corner.

As for the little wife and her repeated evasion of your invitations, there is really no mystery at all. Only experience can give you an idea of the endless difficulties and annoyances which beset the path of a Bengali woman who takes the tiniest step outside the rigid limits of purdah etiquette. She, again, cannot live unto herself. Any breach of decorum on her part would reflect upon her husband professionally, upon little Krishna in his dealings with schoolfellows and playmates, upon the

tradition-ridden members of the family in the patriarchal village home. As for the little woman herself, may she, in her own person, never be the means of enlightening you as to the ingenious persecutions with which Bengalis can visit a disrespect of laws and customs ! I agree with you that it is well worth a big effort to get your little friend into the air, and establish some sort of an outdoor custom for the women of your little community. The great thing is to conduct all your experiments with a due regard for custom and decorum. You will find a way round most of these restrictions, but woe betide those whom you induce to break through them, as Western energy prompts one to do. To give offence in this respect would retard rather than advance your cause. You would disgust every virtuous wife, and alarm every timid husband in the neighbourhood, and the little women would be rigidly secluded, probably even from your visits.

In my time, I made a purdah garden on the banks of the river. It was on land belonging to the firm, but some little distance from the factory. From what you tell me, its site must lie between your place and Surendra's house. I don't think the land has ever been needed for building, probably my garden has been swallowed up by the jungle. Ram Lall will show you where it was. You will find him a sound adviser on the entertainment of purdah ladies. My garden was very popular and the scene of many a merry meeting. I generally escorted my guests myself,

much may be done under the personal protection of the Bara Memsahib of the locality. Well, dear, take heart and persevere. You may think you have accomplished very little, but you have made a beginning. It is easy to begin. The difficulty in every enterprise is to persevere. Don't be too much concerned for swollen heads, that complaint is not confined to Orientals. Take heart, take pains, take risks, and don't hesitate to turn for help to your friend

ALICE LANCASTER."

So, that was the secret of Alice Lancaster's joyous energy and tireless perseverance. The deliberate policy of lifelong risk, and a cool neglect to count costs or regard criticism. The sole root, aim and restriction of her enterprise, the love of her neighbour, built upon the love of God. A faith, simple in precept, searching in practice ; an exacting creed ; an audacious policy. Beatrice rose from her letter reading, cheered, braced, refreshed. She lost no time in passing from theory to action. Calling Ram Lall, she proceeded to question him as to his recollections of the purdah garden.

Yes, Ram Lall remembered Lancaster Memsahib, a Bara Mem indeed. A Memsahib of sweet words and much learning. She also, even as the Memsahib, spent her time with books and papers. Ram Lall cast a condescending eye upon Beatrice's properties on the verandah-

table. Beatrice was conscious that she appeared in the eyes of Ram Lall but as the feeble reflection of a bygone greater light. He remembered the purdah garden. Yes, it was still there, but it was become an evil place, overgrown with jungle, the haunt of snakes and evil beasts. Where was it ? Oh, it was on the eastern side of this place, some little distance from the factory, well into the jungle, and facing the river.

Was it possible to visit the place ?

It might be, Ram Lall would look into the matter. He would report to the Memsahib in the evening. He asked no questions as to Beatrice's reasons for her interest in the place. Memsahibs were inexplicable persons, their ways past finding out. As for Lancaster Mem, she had been a Bara Mem indeed, great had been her wisdom, whatsoever she had done, that had been well. But for another to aspire to such wisdom, such goodness, that was folly ; there was but one Lancaster Mem. Nevertheless, it was not for Ram Lall to question the orders or quibble at the motives of his Memsahib. He took his stick in his hand, and went off on an exploratory expedition into the jungle.

He duly appeared in the evening to report on his discoveries. It was even as he had said. The garden was still there. The jungle had grown high within and without, the place had become evil and choked with weeds, the paths to it overgrown with creepers and plants.

Nevertheless, Ram Lall was prepared to conduct his Memsahib thither, if to go was her wish. Further, he had caused the malis to make passable certain paths to the garden. No doubt as to the Memsahib's wish, Beatrice set out at once to inspect the results of Ram Lall's investigations. He led her along the road behind the factory to a narrow track, freshly cleared, running through dense jungle, towards the river. A solid, green mass, plumb across the track, was the first indication of their arrival at the purdah garden. Ram Lall poked with his stick among the mass of foliage, thrusting and tearing at the draping creepers, until he disclosed a ragged aperture among the greenery. It was the gateway of the garden. A door of rotten wood hung dejectedly upon broken, rusted hinges. Beatrice pushed it aside, and, peering warily at the weedy carpet under her feet, stepped through the gateway. Within, a solid mass of jungle. So far as she could judge, the garden was some fifty feet square. High walls ran round three sides, leaving the fourth open to the river. At each angle of the wall was a fine tree. All trace of the brick of the walls was buried deep in the green masses of shrouding creepers. Creepers swarmed up the trunks of the tall trees, swinging in heavy draperies from their branches. Creepers stretched from walls to trees, from tree to tree, twining and interlacing, until the whole was a solid mass of greenery. The slanting rays of the evening

sun wove glinting patterns of gold, in and out among the green tracery. Beatrice gazed in dismay.

“What a jungle !” she exclaimed.

“A jungle, yet within the power of the mali-folk,” returned Ram Lall, his spirits apparently rising at the spectacle of the Memsahib’s dejection. He poked with his stick, thrusting aside creepers and plants, and disclosing bricks and ground.

Let the Memsahib give the order, and he, Ram Lall, would see to the rest. The mali-folk, together with their coolies, would make clear from jungle the space within the walls. As for the gate, the Memsahib had but to give the order, and the mistress would furnish a new door. Were the walls not whole and standing? There was much work, but no difficulty. He, Ram Lall, would see to it that the place was made clean.

“Except the Sahib give the order, how shall there be malis and mistress?” asked Beatrice. “Further, there is need of wood for the gate.”

“There is need of wood for the gate, as also for benches,” agreed Ram Lall. “Yet shall the Sahib give the order and all shall be accomplished.”

“If the Sahib consent,” said Beatrice, doubtfully.

“Behold, is not the Memsahib ever at the side of the Sahib?” demanded Ram Lall, impatiently. “How shall the Sahib refuse the request of the Memsahib. Shall he not, after much asking, grow weary and consent?”

“There is much work,” said Beatrice.

“Much work, but little difficulty,” returned Ram Lall.

“The Memsahib would make again a purdah garden?” he asked, as they retraced their steps, single file, along the narrow track.

“What think you, Ram Lall?” returned Beatrice, answering question with question. “Will the purdah women-folk come to this garden?”

Ram Lall shrugged sceptical shoulders and waved scornful hands. “Who shall understand the mind of these people?” he said indifferently. “The customs of the people of this country are past finding out.”

“Yet in the time of Lancaster Mem, they came,” said Beatrice.

“In the time of Lancaster Mem they came,” agreed Ram Lall. “Was Lancaster Mem not a Bara Mem, a respecter of customs, one who understood?” He shook his head, and relapsed into silence. His manner suggested that Beatrice was presumptuously attempting to fill the shoes of a person of a piety and capacity infinitely superior to her own.

“ How came they ?” she asked. “ Did they walk ?”

“ They walked,” said Ram Lall briefly.

“ Alone ?” asked Beatrice.

“ Even in the company of the Bara Mem, of Lancaster Mem did they walk,” admitted Ram Lall, evidently loath to give publicity to the excessive condescension of his one-time Memsahib. “ But she was a Bara Mem indeed,” he added sturdily. “ Whatsoever she did, even that was fitting. Yet it is not well that a Memsahib should make herself small in the eyes of the babu-folk,” he concluded, his tone full of warning.

Beatrice accepted Ram Lall’s advice, to the extent of acquainting the Sahib with her difficulties as to the purdah garden that very evening. The old chaprassi’s policy of wearisome importunity was fortunately uncalled for : the Sahib lent a sympathetic ear to his wife’s story. He was unaware of the existence of the purdah garden, and was keenly interested in Beatrice’s account of its origin and uses in Alice Lancaster’s time. He listened appreciatively to his wife’s summary of Alice’s speculations as to Surendra’s mental processes *re* the rejected appointment. To Beatrice’s anxious question as to whether he objected to her following in the footsteps of her friend, he gave an emphatic negative. Far from objecting to her experiment, he was inclined to approve. He had no

sympathy with Hammond's views, save in regard to Miss Brown.

Beatrice laughed. "I have no ambition to emulate Miss Brown," she said.

"I'm not afraid of that," said Weston, joining in her laugh. "All the same, I've suffered many things and endless disappointments from Bengalis. It may be, as Mrs. Lancaster suggests, that there are always reasons which don't appear,—in fact, I know from experience that such is often the case. All the same, I have seldom been able to probe through the tangle of prevarications to the real facts of the case, and I have practically never been able to do any good when I have."

"And yet you don't agree with Mr. Hammond's predictions," said Beatrice, leaning over her husband's chair.

"Oh, Hammond be jiggered," said the Sahib impatiently. "Hammond's an anachronism, his theories are of historical interest only. No, what I am afraid of is that you may let yourself in for some heart-breaking disappointment. If you could treat the whole thing simply as an experiment, and leave your heart out of it...."

"It is too late for that already," said Beatrice, shaking her head. "No, I couldn't manage that."

"I shouldn't like to think you could," rejoined Weston. "Well, dear, it is your pidgin. Are you ar game to take the risk?"

“ Alice Lancaster’s very words !” exclaimed Beatrice.

“ She’s a wise woman,” said Weston, quick to appreciate the wisdom which coincided with his own axioms. “ Then you are not meddling with my babus,” he continued ; “ perhaps it is just as well that Surendra did not accept this job. It certainly makes things simpler.”

“ And what about the purdah garden ?” asked Beatrice coaxingly.

“ I suppose it must be ‘ Ap jo hukum ’ (according to your Honour’s orders),” said the Sahib resignedly. “ Is it a very mighty task ?”

“ Pretty well,” returned Beatrice, and she gave a detailed description of the state of the garden.

“ Hmmm,” said the Sahib. “ However, if Ram Lall has undertaken to run the show . . .”

“ I don’t think he approves of my doings at all,” said Beatrice.

“ But he worshipped Lancaster Mem,” said Weston.

“ He thinks me unworthy to touch the latchet of her shoe,” smiled Beatrice.

“ Well, it is an ambitious project,” commented Weston.

Ram Lall was as good as his word. He made good use of the malis and coolis the Sahib placed at his disposal. He was careful that their groaning, under his oppressions, reached not to

the ear of the Memsahib. Within a week the garden and the paths approaching it were clear of jungle. Sufficient creeper was spared to adorn the high walls, nor was the ground scraped hideously bare of green covering. Ram Lall had developed an eye for beauty under the tutelage of Lancaster Mem, that Bara Mem indeed. Under his exacting orders, benches were made and placed in the shade of the trees. The rotten gate was removed from its remaining hinge, and replaced with a stout door, provided with a sturdy bolt. The paths were cleared of choking plants, and hammered smooth for the feet. Ram Lall looked upon the work of his hands and saw that it was good. He brought the Memsahib to the scene of his labours and demanded her approval.

And now all was ready for the Great Adventure. The preparations, and the end thereof, were no secret from the surrounding population. Far and wide, the operations of Ram Lall in the jungle-buried purdah garden, and the intentions of the Memsahib regarding it, were discussed by high and low. Many and various were the motives ascribed to Beatrice and to her projects. She was in league with missionaries, she was a Government agent, she was a reincarnation of Lancaster Mem. The women longed and feared to be bidden to the excitements of the predicted purdah parties. The men coveted the distinction of Beatrice's patronage, but quaked for the danger to domestic discipline.

Every visit the Memsahib paid to Surendra's house was duly noted and discussed. Binodini was envied, derided, and made the subject of endless gossip and argument. Secure in Surendra's independent position, she was, in the main, oblivious of the excitement around her; nevertheless, she received Beatrice's first invitation to accompany her to the restored garden with very considerable heart-quaking and apprehension. Never had she walked a step outside the walls of her own courtyard. She had arrived at her husband's house, some twelve months previously, in a closely shuttered gharri. Only once, had she ventured forth, on a pilgrimage to the Temple of Kali, and then, the same, grimly decorous vehicle had conveyed her. Now, she was asked to walk a full fifty yards from her gate to the garden. Even a stout heart might be excused for a few flutterings.

Surendra, face to face with the actual, practical embodiment of his oft-expressed desire for fresh air and freedom for his women-folk, was not without his own share of apprehension. Nor was his anxiety without foundation. He had gathered something of the general local interest in his household affairs, in the course of his professional visits. To mention the name of his wife may not be an offence against Hindu piety, but to hear, without hot indignation, that name on every gossip's lips, is equally impossible for husbands of all races. The hints, too, as to the probable effect of his wife's social elevation

upon Surendra's domestic comfort, were not lost upon that man of robust theory and timid practice. Hence, a series of apologetic notes from Binodini, a flood of verbal thanks and excuses from Surendra. Binodini wasn't well. She had extra duties, she had visitors, she had many letters to write, Krishna was ailing, and so on for a week.

Beatrice listened, wrote, and bided her time. She conducted Krishna to the purdah garden, bade him remark the solitude of the sheltered paths, the complete seclusion of the garden. She pointed out to his eager gaze the enchantments of the garden, the view of the river, the ships, the possibilities of bathing. She suggested that his mother would love to see these things, and was confounded to see Krishna, convulsed with mirth at the very notion of his mother's going abroad. Beatrice proceeded to explain the history and nature of the purdah garden. She told Krishna how the half legendary Lancaster Mem had herself brought purdah ladies to walk and sit there, she suggested that in Krishna's care his mother might very probably like to venture out. Krishna looked wise, and suggested that his mother might possibly dare so much in the company of the Memsahib, otherwise, Krishna shook his sleek black head.

Leaving Krishna thus charged with plans and projects to prepare the way before her, Beatrice waited yet another few days, careful in the meantime neither to write notes, nor to

introduce the subject of the garden during her Bengali lessons. The ruse answered. There came a neatly written invitation from Binodini. Would Beatrice visit her that evening? She feared lest she had offended, let the Memsahib show favour and pardon. It was true that by many difficulties she had, up to the present, been prevented from visiting the garden, but now she was free. That very evening they would make a bandobast.

Beatrice went. She laughed away Binodini's apprehensions of having offended her, patted Krishna's sleek head in wordless appreciation of his efforts. The bandobast for the expedition to the purdah garden was made, there and then, for 4-30 on the following afternoon, the brief evenings of December demanding early hours.

Never did Beatrice forget that particular chapter in the Great Adventure. From early morning, she was bombarded with anxious chits from Binodini.

Lest, in the multitude of her business, the Memsahib should forget her appointment, Binodini wrote. . . .

For that, at five, the gates of the factory opened and many folk walked abroad, Binodini wrote yet again, to implore the Memsahib to delay not her coming, but to be at the house at half-past four.

Let the Memsahib pardon these many and most disgusting chits, but the wife of Bihari

Babu, a neighbour, she whose husband was of the Sahib's babus, would fain come also.

Beatrice wrote to agree.

Let the Memsahib yet once again show favour and pardon, but the sister-in-law of Binodini had much care and anxiety of heart, perchance the Memsahib would show kindness and come so soon as four o'clock. Thus, they might first, sitting in the house, have conversation. Having talked together, they would go forth. In the company of the Memsahib, how should they be afraid ?

At three-thirty Krishna appeared on the verandah in the custody of the disapproving Ram Lall.

"Behold, since two o'clock, has he stood at the gate," said Ram Lall in apologetic tones.

"Let him come," said Beatrice, by this time almost as nervous as her chit-writing protégées, and thankful for the child's company. "What is it, Krishna ?" she said.

"To bring the Memsahib to our house am I come," said Krishna, letting Beatrice draw him down to a chair, and plainly weary with his share of the excitement of the day.

"I will come, I will come!" said Beatrice, cheerfully. "First let us drink tea," as the khansaman appeared with a tray. She mixed a cup of milk and sugar for her guest, who was

too small as yet to be troubled with caste restrictions, and handed it to him. Krishna drank appreciatively, he had passed a harassed day. It is not bliss to be in charge of an agitated feminine household. He was too true to his trust to let Beatrice linger over her tea, and by four o'clock they were at the gate of Surendra's house.

The little women were in full gala array. Beatrice could have wished that persons, so fearful of attracting undue attention, had been less lavish of colour and ornament in their dress. Binodini was resplendent in a sari of emerald green silk, glittering with jewels, jingling with anklets, chains, and bangles. The lady of the wheaten skin was no less glorious in her apparel. A yellow silk sari, endless baubles, with a proportionate accompaniment of tinkling, made her as conspicuous an object as ever sought to run, unobserved, the gauntlet of her neighbours' prying eyes.

They greeted Beatrice with touching eagerness. Bihari's wife was not present---she was afraid, reported her friends. She had no courage, that one. No *débutante*, about to make her courtesy to her sovereign, was ever more timid than these women, faced with no more exciting an adventure than a fifty yards' walk to a walled-in garden. In the strong tower of the presence of the Memsahib, their spirits rose, their confidence returned, they took the momentous step without the gate with smiling courage.

Never had Beatrice dreamed that three women walking through dense foliage could appear so conspicuous, or produce such a chorus of jingling and rustling. Much less had she imagined the possibility of a mighty crowd of witnesses along that jungle route. Nor did the invisibility of these last detract from the embarrassment of their unmistakable presence. Gates she had never noticed before, creaked and closed, as the two clinked and jingled past. Bangles tinkled behind walls, which were plainly alive with eyes and ears. Saris and dhotis fluttered from upper lattices, voices whispered, bare feet pattered. Beatrice felt much as one who dreams those horrid visions of a half-naked progress through crowded streets or public buildings. Fortunately, her charges, distracted by the novelty of their unwonted surroundings, jingled along, unconscious of the invisible attention they were attracting. But even the longest fifty yards has an end, and in due course they found themselves in the safe shelter of the purdah garden. Here the spirits of the little women rose, and they chattered and laughed gaily. The river drew cries of wonder and delight. Two years had they dwelt by this sacred stream, yet, not once had they looked upon its waters. They strolled round the enclosure, admiring the trees, resting on the benches. Beatrice told of Mrs. Lancaster, and her purdah parties, enlarged on the desirability of fresh air for health, and deprecated the sacrifice of

amusement and strength to a mere Musulman prejudice. A knock on the great gate was answered by Beatrice, as the only person whom custom permitted to face publicity. Without, stood Ram Lall, behind him, a group of eager, giggling children, who set up a shout and fled at the sight of the Mem-sahib. But little Krishna, at Beatrice's bidding, called them back, and led them proudly into the garden. They arranged themselves in a solemn row on one of the benches, and gazed at the Memsahib with big, serious eyes.

"Come!" cried Beatrice, "play, this is not school!"

The children only gazed at her in solemn disapproval, clearly it was not etiquette to romp in the presence of the Memsahib.

"Oh, do make them play!" said Beatrice to Binodini.

"Come, Gopal! Come, Balaram, play!" cried Binodini.

The boys rose to the occasion, but still the little girls sat primly on the bench.

"In my country," said Beatrice, "the girls run and play, even as the boys."

Gopal, an enterprising youth, proceeded to invite the little girls. One by one, they relaxed and joined in the romp. The games proved very much the same as the English blindman's buff and tag. Beatrice and Binodini, exchanging youthful

reminiscences, discovered that their recollections had much in common. Both confessed to a past predilection for blindman's buff, a passion for pictures and other young delights. The brothers of both races were proved to be given to teasing, past experts in the gentle art of aggravation. Western and Eastern methods might differ, but the sum-total of feminine irritation was much the same. Binodini's brother had been wont to pounce upon his small sister's portion of rice and bear it off, amid her plaintive cries, and his own derisive shouts. Beatrice had suffered from sly tweaks at her pendent pigtails. Oh! so had Binodini. Both had been terrified out of their youthful wits by fearsome bogies, contrived by these same ingenious brothers.

The little girls, Rani and Asalata, came up, and were questioned as to their scholastic attainments. Binodini shook her head over the ignorance of modern feminine youth, more especially the youth of West Bengal. When she was Rani's age, she was an expert pen-woman, a skilful reader. Her attitude was emphatically that of the superior person.

It was almost dusk, as Beatrice led her tinkling party home. She was tired but triumphant, as she made ready for bed that night. The first stumbling block was surmounted, the Great Adventure was advanced another step. She smiled to herself, as she recollected Binodini's attitude of the superior person. So far, in the course of her experiment, she had met only

superior persons. She ran over the names of these elect, as she drew in the folds of the mosquito curtain. Surendra, Binodini, Ram Lall, Mr. Hammond, Miss Brown, each, in his or her own special sphere, claimed a superiority to the common herd around them. As for her Sahib, did she not know him to be a man above all others? And finding this her own conclusion of the matter she went off to sleep, laughing at her own expense.

CHAPTER VII.

“HEAVENS!” exclaimed the Sahib, “here comes Miss Brown with a racquet!”

It was early March, and a tennis party was in full swing in the big, green courts which rolled down to the river, on the western side of the house. It was one of the mysteries of the life on the river banks that, with the coming of the hot weather, a fierce energy for games set in, which raged, despite the heat, up to the breaking of the rains. Like her fellow-hostesses, Beatrice made use of her tennis parties to clear off social obligations to persons of all descriptions, whether players or not. There was always a heterogeneous collection of non-players gathered behind the tea table for gossip, and to this group Beatrice had mentally relegated Miss Brown.

“I had no idea you played!” she said, greeting her guest, outwardly cheerful, inwardly apprehensive of the disgust of the men doomed to play in Miss Brown’s set.

“I believe in encouraging healthful amusements,” snapped Miss Brown, emphasizing her remark with a threatening flourish of the racquet. Her sports kit proclaimed, even more blatantly than her customary garb, Miss Brown’s superiority to fashion and vain adornments. Her

figure suggested a well-nourished ironing-board, her brain might well envy the power and breadth of her lower understandings. Beatrice contemplated her guest, and looked round the gathering of flannelled males, who avoided her partner-seeking eye with extraordinary avidity.

The tinkle of a bicycle bell on the jungle road brought relief to her heart and sincerity to the fixed smile upon her lips. At the same moment, the khansaman appeared with a temporary reprieve in the guise of tea and cakes. Settling the suspicious, but unresisting, Miss Brown in the most comfortable chair at hand, Beatrice left her to the seductions of the khansaman, and went to meet that cheery cyclist, Padre Bennett. Padre Bennett was a well-known feature of riverside tennis parties, the unwearying partner of bad players. Though an excellent player, thanks to his recognized rôle he rarely won a set. He received his sentence this afternoon with his usual round-eyed serenity.

“ Ah, yes ! “ The very person ! I am looking for a for Miss Brown, this afternoon.”

“ New scheme ? ” inquired Hammond, setting down an empty tea cup.

“ Exactly,” nodded the padre, wisely. “ A scheme. Well, well ! ” as Miss Brown, refreshed by tea, and clutching her racquet threateningly, bore down upon her luckless partner, “ Well, well ! After a game ! After a game ! ”

It was the padre's common fate to go tealess, or to drink the chilly draught which greets those who emerge from the first sets. To-day he was hot and dusty after his ride, but Miss Brown had no searching glances to spare for the obvious, and off he marched to a sure defeat.

But Padre Bennett was Miss Brown's match in dogged persistence, and even in lack of observation. He suffered but one strategic defeat, before he pinned his partner to a convenient chair, and proceeded to bombard her with his most recent scheme for the advancement of her Oriental studies. Nor was he handicapped by foolish reticence. He expounded the outline of his scheme in the hearing of the entire gathering, assembled for the refreshment of cold drinks and ice-creams. From his capacious pockets he produced a sheaf of letters.

"I will not trouble you with the whole of the Bishop's letter," he said, tapping the lengthy document in his hand, and mentioning the name of a well-known episcopal missionary enthusiast. "But his lordship's idea is simply this. To board out sundry Indian children of good birth in European families of culture, and to give them the benefit of a real Western training, until such time as the War shall be over and we can consider the question of sending them to England."

"Well!" snapped Miss Brown unsuspectingly, looking grimly round the assembled

representatives of European families of culture. "I should think there are several persons here, very suitable."

"My dear lady!" exclaimed Padre Bennett, admiringly, "I knew I should find a sympathetic co-worker in you. You shall choose first from the Bishop's list."

"Now, now!" waving aside the startled ejaculations which began to pour from Miss Brown's lips. "Certainly you must have the first choice. Let me see! Let me see! Here's Bipin Krishna Bose. Quite a decent record, five years old. Nice companionable age, yet young enough for the character to be plastic," nodded Padre Bennett, raising his kind round gaze to Miss Brown's horrified countenance.

"But....but...." stammered his victim. "I couldn't possibly....."

"Not a bit of it!" returned the padre, encouragingly. "You're too modest, my dear lady! I see in you the makings of an excellent mother!"

Hammond, who thus far had witnessed the scene with malicious enjoyment, hastily turned his back and bent over the khansaman's preferred tray.

"A dear friend of my own," said a faded female, whose tussore-clad flat form and topi-crowned sleek head wrote missionary all over her in unmistakable characters. "A dear

friend made a very similar experiment. She adopted a little Indian child, a boy...."

"And how did it succeed?" asked Beatrice kindly, as Miss Brown's scarlet face and working lips proclaimed her inability, as yet, to return to the verbal fray.

"Well, of course, there were little trials," said the missionary lady, with evasive discretion.

"I should imagine so," said Mrs. Hammond, in tones of delicate disgust.

"I always say that environment and training are half the battle," proclaimed the stentorian tones of a managing memsahib from across the river. "Put a native child in a European nursery, quite away from all native surroundings, and of course he'd grow up just like his English companions."

"Then you'll take one of these little ones!" said the padre, turning a gratified gaze on the managing memsahib.

"I!" exclaimed the lady. "No! no! Padre Bennett! My nursery keeps my hands full enough as it is, I couldn't do justice to another child."

"Nor I!" said the missionary lady, hastily, as the padre's round eyes sought her faded face.

"We have our work, you know."

"But a hobby! Something to cheer the lonely home," suggested the padre.

"It seems to me just in your line," said the managing memsahib, addressing the missionary lady. "The child could live with you, attend your schools, and your church. Why! you have every facility!"

"Quite a splendid opportunity," snapped Miss Brown.

"But I have no family," protested the alarmed spinster. "Padre Bennett wants a nursery. Now you" turning to the managing memsahib.

"Out of the question," said the managing memsahib, decidedly. "Now you, Miss Brown," turning to that lady, whose sandy head was shaking solemn disapproval of this typical demonstration of race prejudice. "Here's just the chance for you! Take a Bengali child, have it with you day and night, and in a month you'd be talking like a native."

"Exactly," nodded Padre Bennett. "Exactly what Miss Brown is going to do. Bipin Krishna Bose" he turned again to his papers.

"Impossible!" cried Miss Brown. "You forget I am not a free agent. Mr. Hammond would never agree...."

"I'm quite sure Hammond would raise no objection at all," said Padre Bennett, beaming benignly at the averted back and shaking shoulders of Hammond.

"That's it, padre!" said the perjured Hammond, in tones whose heartiness struck terror to the heart of Miss Brown.

"But but" stammered Miss Brown, whose scarlet countenance and starting eyes proclaimed her genuine alarm.

"No buts about it," said the padre cheerfully.

"But," said Beatrice, "who are these children, padre? Are they orphans?"

"Certainly not," said Padre Bennett. "They are normal Indian children, from typical Indian families."

"But what does Papa Babu think about it?" asked one of the guests.

"Oh! Of course they'll be delighted!" said Miss Brown, unable to contemplate the possibility of black disliking white.

"I'm not so sure," said the Sahib.

"I'm quite sure they won't," said Beatrice, decidedly.

"Then how has Padre Bennett got his list?" asked Mrs. Hammond.

"Come, padre! Own up!" cried Hammond. "Are you canvassing our affections for children of your own dark imagination?"

"I'll read you the parents' letters," said Padre Bennett cheerfully, producing a sheaf of unopened envelopes. "Let's see! Here's the

letter from Miss Brown's child, Bipin. Tut, tut !" as a snort from Miss Brown testified to her annoyance.

" Let us see what Bipin's father has to say."

" Reverend Sir and Esquire,

" I crave to bring to the tender attentions of Your Honour, my reception of Your Excellency's honourable proposals for my unworthy family. This said family, by your highness' glorious proposals for the son Bipin, is gladly recognizable of a profound exaltation. But man proposing, God discommoding. The grandmother of the Bipin, she is lady of supreme mental robustity. She is stick of the large log ! An old one of the school ! To all my prayers this so plump-hearted lady turning always the addled ear. To her, your Honour's propositions for the Bipin are a botheration. All my tears are deficient to dissolve the so tough chest of this tight-brained lady. Let Your Excellency show favour upon your Honour's most sorrowful slave, whose sprightly ambitions are, by the female machinings of his feminine family, dead in their buds.

" May God preserve Your Honour in the
choicest spirits,

" Yours ever lovingly,

" RAJENDRA NATH BOSE."

"He doesn't seem quite to like the idea," suggested Padre Bennett, turning his round bewildered gaze upon the circle of convulsed faces.

"There are some more," said Hammond, turning over the heap of envelopes in the padre's lap. "What have these other fellows got to say?"

"Most Reverend and Adorable Sir," read the padre. "In respect of most nobly condescending suggestion for the adoption of the son of your most faithfully, I have no words to propel the too much gratefulness of my flabbergasted family. Alas! Alas! The silverest cloud has its thorns, the fact on the point being the obstreperous objections of my best beloved wife. Most adorable and righteous reverend Sir! Who like yourself shall compromise a mother's love! Since her birthday, this gentle lady has not outstepped from her home. In the safe segregation of the family chest, how shall she have any apprehension of the requisitions and demandations of the scurry burly of these latter days! In the so sweet misunderstandings of his pure mother, the cultivation of the sterile intellect of her excessively beloved son, is one unnecessary, disgusting in its absurd banality. Beloved Sir! Extend the oleaginous mercy of your so saccharine pardon to this sweet simple Simon. In the words of your so depressing proverb, 'Why pulling the pearls out of the pig?'"

“Just exactly what I always have said,” exclaimed Miss Brown, whose courage rose as the refusals multiplied. “It is these narrow-minded purdah women who are holding their country back.”

“I see nothing narrow about refusing to hand over one’s children to foreigners!” said Mrs. Hammond, for once a supporter of Indian liberties.

“Foreigners!” exclaimed Miss Brown. “Do you suggest that a Bengali could possibly presume to call me a foreigner!”

“My dear Miss Brown, even the Smiths, Browns and Joneses are foreigners, when they honour foreign countries with their presence,” said Padre Bennett, peering reprovingly through his circular glasses.

“I refuse to look upon myself as a foreigner,” said Miss Brown, with sour decision.

“And I’d be sorry to see the country where you looked natural,” muttered Hammond, sotto voce.

“Well, padre,” said the Sahib, “I fear you have roused a vain desire in our longing breasts.”

“These natives are sadly unappreciative,” murmured the missionary lady.

“Don’t know a good thing when they see it,” said the managing memsahib.

"I'm entirely in agreement with them," said Mrs. Hammond.

"I too," said Beatrice.

"Well, well!" said the padre, "no doubt you're right. We must find an orphan for Miss Brown. No, no! my dear lady!" as Miss Brown's lean lips began to pour forth indignant protests. "Your maternal cravings must and shall be satisfied. I shall not rest until I have provided you with an orphan."

"Good old Nemesis," chuckled Hammond.

"And now," continued the worthy padre, turning his round gaze upon a globular watch, "we must be off, my dear lady....where?" as Miss Brown bubbled over with angry queries, "Why! to the meeting of the Milor Bagan Zanana Mission, of course. I engaged to take you a week ago. Mr. Hammond not ready? Tut, tut! I have borrowed Mrs. Weston's bicycle. Can't think of it? Don't trouble to think, my dear lady! Come along, come along!" and taking her arm, he hustled his victim away. The tinkle of their bicycle bells fell upon the ears of a company convulsed with laughter.

"My champion! My defender!" chanted Hammond, as the two peddling figures disappeared into the tree-lined distance. "And now, let us have all the news, Mrs. Weston. How goes your wrong-headed race to ruin?"

"Well, you are dining," said Beatrice smiling. "Watch my symptoms and judge for yourself."

“ Now for it, Mrs. Weston,” said Hammond, as they sat round the dinner table. “ How much mischief have you accomplished so far ?”

“ People who keep cousins in cupboards” began Weston severely.

“ Are safe in the shelter of Mother Church,” finished Hammond.

“ I only wish we *could* keep her in a cupboard,” sighed Mrs. Hammond.

“ Is she as enthusiastic as ever ?” asked Beatrice sympathetically.

“ She is as difficult as ever,” returned Mrs. Hammond.

“ Miss Brown,” said Hammond, “ thanks to the vigorous treatment of the padre, is practically cured.”

“ She got pretty hot on oppressed India, this afternoon,” said the Sahib, shaking his head.

“ Not as hot as at the idea of being classed as a foreigner,” said Beatrice.

“ Or the proposal that she should adopt a Bengali child,” said Mrs. Hammond.

“ What really annoyed her was the suggestion that the Bengali child’s parents shouldn’t overflow with joy at such European condescension,” chuckled Hammond.

“ And how could you say that you had no objection ?” said Mrs. Hammond reproachfully.

“My dear!” returned Hammond. “Believe me, the fear that she will one day come home to find a Bengali orphan established in her rooms, is just the pill that was needed to complete our cousin’s cure. She was practically cured already, now she is convalescent. Another month will see her rabidly anti-Indian. I quite expect to see Miss Brown tried for murdering her bearer yet.”

“It’s rough on the padre,” said the Sahib thoughtfully.

“When Miss Brown answers for the murder of her bearer, the padre will be found guilty of slicing off her own Roman proboscis,” said Hammond.

“Surely the two catastrophies could scarcely be simultaneous,” said Beatrice.

“One will neutralize the other,” said Hammond. “The padre will be exonerated on the ground of intense provocation.”

“Or the necessity for personal defence,” said the Sahib.

“Anyhow he’ll be sacrificed in a good cause,” said Hammond cheerfully.

“I feel inclined to warn him,” said Beatrice indignantly.

“Wouldn’t be any good, Mrs. Weston,” returned Hammond. “Better take the awful warning to heart yourself, and leave these people alone. Now, confess! What stage have

you got to ? Disappointment, boredom, or disgust ?”

“ She hasn’t reached the first yet,” said Weston, smiling at his wife.

“ I think I have passed it,” said Beatrice.
“ Anyhow, I’m not bored.”

“ Bad sign,” said Hammond. “ Better be bored than make mischief, and mischief you will make in the long run, Mrs. Weston.”

“ I think myself that Bengalis don’t like us any better than we like them,” said Mrs. Hammond. “ See what a flood of eloquence was produced by the padre’s hunt for children to adopt.”

“ That was natural,” said Beatrice.

“ A better example is that doctor babu fellow’s refusal of a good appointment,” said Hammond.

“ For which he applied to-day on his own initiative,” said the Sahib.

“ No!” cried Beatrice.

“ Didn’t I tell you ?” said Hammond.

“ You told us nothing of the sort,” Beatrice reminded him. “ First you said he’d jump at it, and then you said you’d always known he wouldn’t look at it....”

“ And now, I say that he’ll hold it just so long as it suits him, and then, when he has turned the whole place topsyturvy, and sucked the

orange dry, he'll walk off suddenly, and leave you in the lurch, Weston. That's what he'll do."

"You advised us to suck him dry," Beatrice reminded him.

"So I did," said Hammond stoutly. "And so I do. Take him, if it suits you, Weston, by all means. But keep your weather-eye open, and be prepared. He'll let you down as sure as eggs. He's probably in some shady scrape. The Bengali always has some motive in the background."

"I confess something like that had occurred to me," said the Sahib.

"Not a doubt about it," said Hammond, "the fellow's probably in debt."

"I think he's perfectly straight, himself," said Weston.

"Then some shady relative is bleeding him, or there's a sister's wedding on the carpet, and pressure from the ancestral home. Now mark my words. The fellow will come in. He'll want leave at frequent intervals, he'll want loans, his work will deteriorate, he will make all sorts of muddles, and, having worked up to a muddled climax, he'll resign. As for you, Mrs. Weston, you'd better drop him like a hot potato."

"If not, what will be my fate, since your mood is prophetic?" laughed Beatrice.

"Either you'll find your friend's door politely but steadily closed against you, which,

in my opinion, would be by far the best thing to happen, or you'll simply play Cain with the domestic happiness of the family. I'm not joking, Mrs. Weston. Seriously, I do wish you'd drop this hobby." Hammond spoke earnestly. It was clear that he spoke from conviction.

"Surely, you must see that it will be wiser not to meddle with your husband's babus," said Mrs. Hammond gently.

Beatrice was silent, she knew already from her own experience that Hammond's warning was not without foundation. The visits to the purdah garden had become an institution, the little women accompanied her cheerfully and without perturbation. But there had been a period when Hammond's prophecy might have applied. There had been the long struggle with Binodini's refusals to venture out of doors. She had certainly felt, on the afternoon of the first visit to the walled garden, that she was bringing anything but peace to her Bengali friends. But now she was in smooth water. She was almost sorry to hear that Surendra had accepted the appointment. She was vaguely conscious that any change might upset her friends and undo her work. She sat pondering, her face grave. Then she raised her head and smiled as her husband's voice broke the silence.

"My wife believes in taking risks," he said.

"Do you know anything of this sudden change of Surendra's?" asked Weston, as the sound of

the horn of the Hammonds' motor died away in the distance.

"Nothing," said Beatrice. "He has never mentioned it."

"I'm glad of it," said the Sahib. "He might have tried to work it through you."

"Shall you mind if I still visit his wife?" asked Beatrice.

"My dear," returned the Sahib, "as I said to Hammond, we will take the risk."

CHAPTER VIII.

FROM the day, in mid-March, that Surendra and his family moved into the tiny house, which formed the factory doctor babu's quarters, Beatrice found herself frequently reminded of Hammond's prophecies. It was possible to perceive the beginning of the topsyturvy turning in Surendra's request that the quarters next his own, which chanced to be about to change hands, might be given to Bihari Babu, Surendra's nearest neighbour in the jungle. There was no reason against it, Bihari was employed in the office of the factory. It was not unnatural that Surendra should be anxious for his wife to have old acquaintances as neighbours. His request was granted, but Beatrice found herself wishing that Surendra had not been so prompt with requests and changes. Binodini's door was certainly not closed to the Memsahib, but there was no persuading Binodini to take a step outside that door. There was no direct refusal, but all the old excuses were brought up again. The household duties, sickness, visitors, letters, Beatrice knew them all by heart. She accepted them with outward complacency and inward scepticism, and patiently bided her time. Meanwhile, Bihari's children pressed her to visit their home

as she did Krishna's. She made her usual stipulation for a written invitation, which was, in due course, presented at the gate. Her new correspondent's caligraphy was a puzzling contrast to the clear, neat handwriting of Binodini. Beatrice pored vainly over the spidery hieroglyphics, straggling over the grubby, stained paper, and finally put the conundrum before Surendra during the Bengali reading.

"This is the writing of an exceedingly illiterate person," was Surendra's grave comment, as he deciphered the ill-spelt, ill-worded note. The tone of the note was new to Beatrice's experience. It was less dignified than Binodini's compositions, yet aimed at a fulsome flattery. It had the compensation of being rich in idiom, and it certainly conveyed a hearty invitation. Beatrice wrote her acceptance, and in due course Ram Lall escorted his Memsahib to the house next Surendra's, and knocked at the door. The situation of the factory babus' quarters was a striking contrast to the green seclusion of Surendra's big house in the jungle. The row of low thatched huts stood but a few yards back from the busy road, which ran through the bazaar into the jungle. Neither compound nor paling divided the houses from the tiny common, scantily covered with stubbly grass, which formed the general route to the adjoining houses. Between the row of houses and the bazaar, immediately opposite Surendra's house, stood

the house of Romesh, the head babu. This house was generally regarded as eminently desirable,—in fact, as the plum of the babus' quarters. Built of brick, a warren of innumerable small rooms, it was not only enclosed with the high brick wall of Bengali social distinction, but it rejoiced in the further importance of a second storey. This second storey consisted only of a single room, with a vast expanse of chhat, as the flat terrace of the roof was called, but the flat roof and the upper room were keenly coveted, both for hot weather nocturnal resort and as observation posts. As she stood at Bihari's door, facing the row of bazaar shops, each with its groups of chattering buyers, pointing and peeping at the unwonted spectacle of a Memsahib and a chaprassi at a babu's door, uneasily conscious of the possibilities behind the closed shutters of Romesh's upper room, Beatrice began to have some suspicion as to the reasons for Binodini's renewed reluctance to go out.

There was a rattle of the latch, Ram Lall hastily stepped back from the door, which swung slowly open, apparently automatically, for no one appeared. Beatrice stepped in and found herself in a passage between two houses. The door immediately swung back, revealing the round eyes and smiling face of Bihari's little daughter. She shut and latched the door, and signed to Beatrice to follow her. She led the way down the passage, and round to a low

verandah from which the rooms opened. In a low doorway stood a woman of some thirty years of age, robed only in a dingy sari. She wore no ornaments of any description, the vermilion marriage mark was absent from the parting of her hair. She raised a pair of thin work-worn hands to her forehead in greeting.

“Namaskar,” said Beatrice, answering the greeting, and hesitating. “Is this your little girl?” she asked after a pause.

The dark eyes brimmed with tears. “Of me there is none,” replied the woman shaking her head.

“You are a widow?” asked Beatrice gently, looking at the unadorned head and the ringless hands.

The woman made the affirmative sidelong jerk of the head, dashing the tears from her eyes with the frayed end of her old sari.

A jingle of anklets proclaimed the advent of a happier woman, and a small, plump person entered the room.

“This is the wife of Bihari,” said the widow.

The newcomer, though gorgeous with anklets, bangles, chains and every imaginable bauble, yet wore little more than her gay sari. Both women were a striking contrast to Binodini and the lady of the wheaten skin. Their voices were more strident, their manners less reticent, each fixed a gaze of frank curiosity upon the

Memsahib, and left her to open the conversation.

“Did you write the letter?” said Beatrice, turning to the mistress of the house.

Bihari’s wife shook her head.

“She cannot write,” said the widow, “the writing was mine.”

“Oh!” said Beatrice. “And do you live in the house of Bihari Babu?”

The woman jerked her head in assent. “Of me there is no husband,” she said, and again her eyes filled with tears.

“She is my sister-in-law, the widow of the brother of the master,” explained Bihari’s wife, gazing solemnly at the Memsahib.

Again the conversation flagged. Beatrice looked round the room. It contrasted no less strongly with Surendra’s house than did its occupants. The inevitable bed was ready spread for the night with dingy bedclothes, upon which the three children scrambled, leaving the dusty trails of their little bare feet upon the soiled sheets. Along the wall, behind Beatrice’s chair, and over her head, depending from strings hanging from the ceiling, was a canopy of shirts and dhotis. The customary table held a heterogeneous assortment of books, bottles of physic, and articles of the toilet. The family combs and brushes seemed to be held in no less honour than the sacred books and images. Upon the walls,

crude pictures of gods and goddesses hung side by side with modern photos. The glass doors of a cheap hanging cupboard displayed an incongruous collection of gods, goddesses, china dogs and cheap presentation teacups. Beatrice thought of Mrs. Hammond's oft-expressed distaste for Bengali houses, and her prophecy that she, Beatrice, would "catch something."

"And have you no children?" she asked, turning to the widow.

Again the faded eyes filled with tears, again the unsigned head shook a dejected negative.

"And you have three children?" said Beatrice, turning to the wife.

"Three," she replied.

"I also have three children," said Beatrice desperately, striving to find some subject which should survive beyond a single question and answer.

The two faces lighted with interest. Questions flowed freely, and Beatrice was soon supplying all the usual particulars as to the whereabouts of the children, Daisy's age and prospects, and her own solitary condition.

"And the Memsahib's daughter is still unmarried!" exclaimed Bihari's wife in incredulous tones.

"And you will, as yet, make no marriage for her?" chimed in the widow.

Beatrice explained.

“Except it be her will, she will make no marriage!” repeated the wife, her eyes round with astonishment.

“According to the will of the maiden are these matters arranged!” echoed the widow. “According to the will of the maiden! It is a good custom,” was her conclusion.

“You think it a good custom?” asked Beatrice.

“Thus shall she not pass the years of her youth a widow, and in grief,” said the widow, the ever ready tears springing to her eyes. “Tell me,” she said abruptly, “at the time of your marriage, what was your age.”

Beatrice proceeded to reply to a searching catechism as to her age, the age of her husband and parents, the number of her sisters, sisters-in-law, brothers, brothers-in-law, their ages, marriages, families, in embarrassing detail. She was well aware that no offence was intended, and that it would be quite within Bengali good form for her to exact a similar detailed family-history from her hostesses. Still, it was all very different to her experiences in Surendra’s house.

“And you bathe only once a week?” said the widow in the tones of a person of reliable information.

“By no means!” exclaimed Beatrice. “Who has spoken such astonishing words?”

“We have heard,” said Bihari’s wife, “that daily, the Sahibs bathe not.”

Beatrice proceeded to explain the methods of the Sahibs, and to reply to a cross-examination as to her own personal habits, no less searching than the inquiry into her age and pedigree.

“Devour my head! (an expression of entreaty)” said the widow earnestly, scrutinizing Beatrice’s conventionally arranged hair, with puzzled eyes, “Devour my head! But do you ever open your hair?”

“Without doubt,” said Beatrice, laughing.

“Let not the Memsahib take offence, but do you scratch your head with a comb?” and she held up a dingy specimen of the article in question.

Again Beatrice patiently explained modes and customs, and denied that memsahibs only loosened their hair once a month.

“As for us, every day, smearing our heads and our bodies with soap, we bathe,” said the widow in superior tones, “and every day, with soap and with water, we wash our hair.”

Beatrice left the house, half irritated, half amused. A tap on the shutters of Binodini’s windows, as she went past, summoned her to more congenial company.

“They are ignorant people,” said Binodini, gently, perceiving Beatrice’s irritation.

“ Oh ! their intentions are good,” said Beatrice, slipping her arm round Krishna as he leaned against her knee.

“ If they offend, it is by reason of ignorance,” agreed Binodini.

“ They are illiterate, as also without refinement,” said the lady of the wheaten skin.

“ And when shall we go to the garden ?” asked Beatrice.

Binodini moved uneasily. “ There are many difficulties,” she said evasively.

“ The door of this house opens on to the road in the sight of all men,” said the sister-in-law candidly.

“ There is a door at the back of the house,” said Beatrice quickly, feeling herself on the right track at last.

But Binodini looked annoyed, and Beatrice, pressing the matter no further, rose to go.

As the heat increased, Hammond’s predictions continued to materialize. Binodini, though pathetically eager for Beatrice’s visits, continued to evade all invitations to accompany her to the purdah garden. Her small face grew thinner and her big eyes took on an anxious expression ; it was plain that she suffered from the confinement of the narrow quarters. Still, Beatrice persevered, visiting, chatting, and carefully avoiding the dreaded subject of the purdah garden. It was evident that Binodini felt her

own attitude towards the Memsahib's invitations to be ungracious, and that she was anxious lest by her conduct she should offend and lose her friend. Timidly she strove, by every delicate attention in her power, to recompense the Memsahib for her apparent ingratitude. Her notes were longer, more frequent, written with infinite care. Scarcely a day passed but one of these chits was handed in by Ram Lall, accompanied by an offering of fruit, flowers, or sweetmeats made by Binodini's own hands. Beatrice faithfully answered the notes, wore the flowers, tasted the sweets, and bided her time, sure that time and patience would accomplish the solution of the mystery. She was engaged one hot April morning, with the tactful assistance of the experienced Ram Lall, in the disposal of an unusually lavish offering of flowers and sweetmeats, when she was startled by the unwonted apparition of the Sahib at ten of the morning.

"Is anything wrong?" she cried, dropping a sugary ball, intended for the basket reserved for Ram Lall's household, upon the verandah floor.

"Yes, and no," said the Sahib, throwing himself into a long chair.

"Do you remember Hammond's predictions about your protégées, Beatrice?"

"I do," said Beatrice, bending over her task of sorting and dividing.

“ Well, Surendra has just applied for leave.”

“ Already ! ” cried Beatrice. “ why, he hasn’t been appointed a month.”

“ Exactly,” returned her husband. “ I suppose that crabbed prophecy of Hammond’s has stuck in my mind, for I confess to have been too much put out to deal with business. I thought I’d run up and see what you knew about it.”

“ I know nothing,” said Beatrice, “ but I’ve felt something in the air, ever since Surendra came into the quarters.”

“ How ? ” asked the Sahib.

“ I couldn’t put it into words,” said Beatrice.

The sweetmeats were by this time arranged to her satisfaction. Dismissing Ram Lall with his assortment of baskets, she sat down by her husband’s side and gave him a brief account of her own position with Binodini.

“ And has Surendra said nothing to you ? ” asked the Sahib.

“ Not a word,” said Beatrice. “ I know all his excuses for his wife’s refusals by heart now, and I have scarcely mentioned the matter to him. He’ll be obliged to refer to his absence this morning. Perhaps he’ll be more communicative. Have you given him leave ? ”

“ I suspect that I shall either have to give him leave or dismiss him,” returned the Sahib. “ You know what these people are ? ”

Beatrice thought of Alice Lancaster's remark that no Bengali lived unto himself. "I expect there's some family trouble," she said.

"Probably," said the Sahib. "Still, I confess to being disappointed in Surendra. How Hammond will crow!"

"I think I rather expected disappointment," said Beatrice.

"I am afraid I have been hoping for once not to meet with it," said the Sahib. "However, another disappointment to my lengthy record is no great odds. What I *don't* like is to have you rebuffed and disappointed, little woman."

"Oh! I'm still for taking the risk," said Beatrice. "I shall hold on."

Beatrice learned little more from Surendra than she knew already, as to his motives for asking leave. He proposed to be absent only three or four days. Yes, he was going to his own village. It was family business which necessitated his going. His sister-in-law would take advantage of his escort to return home. Though he would reveal nothing of the nature of the business which called him home, Surendra relaxed so far as to confide his distress at having imposed upon and annoyed the Sahib. He was apologetically appreciative of the Sahib's leniency and patience. He unbent more and more as he revealed his admiration for Weston, enlarged on his justice, his wide knowledge of

the country and its customs, his unlimited patience and tireless energy. "Never have I met a Sahib so educate, so seempathyful," he concluded, relapsing into the limited English which Beatrice found almost as difficult to comprehend as his Bengali eloquence.

Beatrice made no effort to force Surendra's confidence, it was plain that the hand of the ruler of the patriarchal home, in the distant village, was heavy upon him. Some difficulty, some great anxiety, oppressed him. Disappointment was not confined to the Sahib and the Memsahib.

"Your wife will be without folk," she commented, resolving to take advantage of Binodini's solitude to coax her out of doors.

"She will be without folk," agreed Surendra, turning appealing eyes on the Memsahib's face.

"I will care for her," Beatrice assured him, and she was as good as her word.

In her solitude, Binodini proved more amenable to Beatrice's urgings for an expedition to the purdah garden, but she was full of fears, and it was not until the third day of Surendra's absence that she agreed to accompany Beatrice to the garden. As on the occasion of the first expedition, Krishna was kept employed all day in running to and fro with his mother's anxious chits, and taking the Memsahib's messages of reassurance. The hour for Beatrice's arrival at the house was set earlier and earlier, until

the final chit implored her to be no later than three. It was mid-April, the afternoon sun was fiercely hot, and Beatrice decided to ignore the unreasonable demand without argument or protest. She kept the unwilling Krishna, who, as usual, appeared shortly after two, to fetch her, in the grateful cool of the shuttered drawing-room, until a few minutes before five. Krishna protested and urged, but was clearly appreciative of the comfort of the shaded room. As it was, the short walk to Surendra's house was oppressively hot. The sun beat fiercely upon Beatrice's sunshade and upon Krishna's bare, black head, and the baked earth glowed scorchingly under their feet. Beatrice was thankful when they reached Surendra's door. The factory clock chimed five as she knocked; the factory gates flew open, and immediately she saw the reason for Binodini's anxiety. Out of the gates poured a broad stream of chattering, staring humanity. The bazaar woke up, and hummed and buzzed. Little groups of babus sauntered over the common, before the row of houses. The whole place was alive with eyes and voices. The door swung open and Beatrice stepped in. Binodini was trembling, and on the point of tears.

"If the Memsahib had but come earlier," she panted.

"Be calm, little mother! Be calm!" said Beatrice, pressing Binodini into the chair set ready for herself, and taking the trembling hands in her own firm clasp.

“The factory has opened and many roam the roads,” gasped Binodini, clinging with frail, shaking fingers to the Memsahib’s hands.

“Having waited a little, we will go forth by the other door,” said Beatrice reassuringly, but secretly uneasy.

She kept Binodini talking until the endless patter of footsteps slackened and the buzz of voices lessened. Bidding Binodini draw her sari, a conspicuous emerald green, well over her head and face and follow close behind, she led the way through the door, holding her huge sunshade towards Bihari’s garden wall. Through a suspiciously convenient hole in the thin screen of dharma matting which composed the wall, Beatrice caught the gleam of a watching eye. The apparently accidental collision of her sunshade with the wall produced a jingle of bangles and a suppressed cry. Garments rustled, and the wall shook again, as she drew the bolts of the garden gate. Looking up, she caught sight of a portly figure upon the flat roof of Romesh’s house. The figure vanished at the turn of the Memsahib’s head, but a white garment fluttered at the shuttered window of the upper room. Romesh was in his watch-tower. Cautiously, Beatrice drew back the garden gate and peered out. A couple of babus started back before the opening gate and, seeing the Memsahib, scuttled off. All along the row, babus vanished hastily round the corners of the houses, gates shut and bangles jingled. Not a wall but shook

and rustled as Beatrice and her trembling charge stole along the path towards the jungle road. The distance from Surendra's present quarters to the purdah garden was fully fifty yards further than the route from his former house, and what a gauntlet of eyes and voices that fifty yards of treeless common proved ! Beatrice arrived in the purdah garden, as fully convinced of the impropriety of the adventure as Binodini herself. Of necessity, she kept a bold front, and refused to admit that there was anything wrong, but Hammond's accusations of mischief-making hammered on the doors of her memory as she strove to cheer Binodini. Krishna brought his companions into the garden and they romped as before, but though she grew calmer, the smiles could not be coaxed to Binodini's face. She was no less reticent as to her private troubles than Surendra himself, but she supplied another link in the chain of Hammond's predictions by admitting that Surendra's visit home concerned the money difficulties of one of his brothers. It was dusk when Beatrice left Binodini at her own door. Krishna had gone romping off with his companions. Loathe to leave her friend alone in the darkened house, Beatrice lingered, but Binodini gave her no invitation to remain, and fearing to delay the evening cooking, the Memsahib went.

Binodini shivered as she stood alone in the shadowy house, lighted only by the dim oil lamp which she held in her hand. Surendra

had taught her to laugh at the old custom of touring the rooms at sunset, to chase with lighted lamp the spirits of the dusk from the house. Strong in the presence of her husband, she had neglected the little housewifely duty, but to-night, trembling and starting at every hollow echo of her own soft footfalls in the empty house, she crept from room to room, and gently waved her lamp in each dim corner. As she set down the lamp upon the book-laden table in her own room, something stirred in the far corner by the door. Binodini pressed her hand to her heart and waited. Something came flapping into the dim light of the lamp, and flew out at the window. Binodini drew a long breath. It was only a bat.

What was that ! Footsteps pattered over the floor. She caught up the lamp and carried it to the middle of the room. There was nothing. The footsteps pattered again. There was a thud against the thin wall. Binodini breathed again. The noises were in Bihari's house. Voices sounded on the other side of the wall. Binodini's eyes grew big with apprehension. She stood still and listened.

" I shall not let you go. Speak no more of the matter," came a man's voice.

" It is Bihari Babu," murmured Binodini to herself.

" Thou wilt not let me go ! Thou wilt not let me go !" came the thin, high tones of a woman's

voice. "Wherefore wilt thou not let me go? Hast thou no sense! Wilt thou give offence even to the Bara Memsahib?"

"Speak softly," said the man's voice. "Have I not told thee what is said of women-folk who walk abroad?"

"Who speaks of walking abroad?" cried the thin, high voice angrily. "To sit by the side of the Memsahib in a walled garden, is that to walk abroad?"

"Who goes there?" cried the man's voice suddenly. There was the sound of a banging door, the thud, thud of heavy footsteps over the floor, a scuffle of feminine garments, the jingle of anklets on flying feet.

"Who speaks of walking abroad?" said a new voice, in the squeaky tones peculiar to the corpulent type of babu.

"It is Romesh," muttered Binodini, crouching low on the floor and shivering.

"My wife wearies me with her requests, she would walk with the Memsahib in the purdah garden," said Bihari's voice.

"Fie! Fie!" cried the squeaky voice, raised to penetrate to the further room in which Bihari's wife had taken refuge at his coming. "Fie! Fie! Shall a virtuous woman seek pleasure abroad?"

"Shall the servant scorn the favour of his master?" screamed back the hidden lady.

“What is this talk of favour?” returned the frayed tenor voice.

“Hast thou not heard?” came Bihari’s voice, importantly. “For thy wife, has there been no invitation? Behold, the Bara Memsahib continually requests the presence of my wife in the purdah garden she has made.”

“How shall *my* wife lack invitations,” returned Romesh, fully aware that Bihari knew all the ins and outs of his household, even to his decree that his wife should not make advances of any description to the Bara Memsahib, much less put her purdah foot out of doors.

“And you refused?” came Bihari’s voice.

“The wise bird puts not his feet in the snare,” squeaked Romesh, pompously.

“It is well to chant the praise of him whose salt you eat,” shrieked the feminine voice from the distance.

“What harm to sit in a garden in the company of the Memsahib?” wailed the lugubrious voice of the widowed sister-in-law. “Does not Surendra Babu’s wife thus walk and sit?”

“Surendra Babu’s wife!” squealed Romesh. “Oh, ho! Who speaks of Surendra Babu’s wife! Where will she not walk? Even in the bazaar she may be seen.”

Binodini crouched lower, dragging her sari over her face, but she could not shut out the jeering tones which came through the thin walls.

“Shame !” shrilled Bihari’s wife. “Thy words are false.”

“My words are false, eh !” squeaked Romesh. “Is it not known in the bazaar, and in every house, that this very day, her husband being absent, she abides not in her house, but walks abroad and entertains strangers ?”

“Strangers !” exclaimed Bihari.

“Beware, Romesh !” shrilled the high tones from the inner room. “That the stranger was the Bara Memsahib, that thou knowest well !”

“Aye, the Bara Memsahib !” squeaked Romesh, wheezing out a derisive laugh. “The wife of Suren Babu is a memsahib and the friend of Bara Memsahibs !”

“Therein, what harm ?” returned the shrill voice. “Shall a babu’s wife turn from the friendship of a memsahib ?”

“Shall fishing boats carry ships’ masts !” wheezed Romesh.

“Yet was there friendship ’twixt a lion and a mouse !” screamed the hidden lady.

“And great was the profit of the lion,” chuckled Romesh.

“Hear me, brother,” he squeaked, evidently addressing Bihari: “let not your wife have dealings with the wife of this Suren Babu ! Put not your trust in dwarfs who stretch to grasp the moon.” There was a scuttle of

footsteps, the bustle of departure, the distant bang of the outer door, Romesh was gone.

“Wherefore hearest thou the words of this Romesh?” asked the woman’s voice, again close to the wall.

“Peace! Thou knowest,” returned Bihari’s voice, impatiently. “Is there not between us a debt? Shall I not regard the words of the man of full barns?”

“Concerning the wife of Suren Babu....” began the shrill voice.

“Suren Babu’s wife follows a dangerous path,” returned Bihari.

“There is peril in new ways,” wailed the widow.

“The sum of the matter is that thou goest not,” finished Bihari, and the crouching Binodini heard his footsteps thud along the floor, until the distant bang of the closing door proclaimed that he had followed Romesh out of the house.

There was a rattle at the latch, the door flew open, and Krishna rushed in, sobbing and panting, and threw himself into his mother’s lap. Trembling, he gasped out his tale. Led by the children of Romesh, his erstwhile companions had followed him, a jeering, pointing crowd, through the bazaar. They had derided his father and himself. They had shrieked accusations against his mother. Not all Binodini’s coaxings and soothings could induce him to

reveal more. Presently, his sobs died down and he demanded food, he was hungry and weary. Binodini jumped to her feet with a guilty start. In her crouching eavesdropping and shrinking horror, she had forgotten the foremost duty of the Bengali woman, the evening-cooking. Hastily, she gathered together the cold scraps left over from the morning meal, and put them, with sweetmeats and milk, before Krishna. Krishna ate in silence, he made no comment, but his small heart was heavy with foreboding. Was this not what his companion had prophesied as the unhappy fate of him whose mother, with unveiled face, walked the bazaars? Had they not screamed to him that he should eat stale rice?

CHAPTER IX.

SURENDRA returned early on the morning following the expedition to the purdah garden. Beatrice was conscious of a vague feeling of guilt when he appeared for the customary reading. His gentle "No harm! No harm!" in reply to her questions as to the propriety of the walk, failed to reassure her. She was convinced that there was an even more serious foundation for Binodini's timidity than the annoyances experienced on the previous day. Notwithstanding, she was still determined that by no lack of effort on her own part should Binodini again become a prisoner. Surendra's own aspect was not encouraging. He was absent and nervous. The reading dragged, conversation trailed off into an uneasy silence.

"Verily, with you, is there anxiety of mind and heaviness of heart?" ventured Beatrice at last.

Surendra sighed, and stirred uneasily in his chair.

"I have given to the Sahib, for his kindness, disappointment, for his belief," he ceased abruptly, and dropped his face into his hands.

"Have you no faith in the Sahib that you tell him not of your grief?" asked Beatrice.

“Of a truth, the Sahib perceives that you are troubled.”

Surendra sat silent, his fingers restlessly twisting a piece of paper, his knees moving in the swinging gesture, so soothing to the Oriental performer, so irritating to the Western spectator.

“Can you not make known to the Sahib your grief?” asked Beatrice again.

Surendra shook his head. “I have given to the Sahib disappointment,” he repeated dejectedly. “How shall the Sahib have faith in me?”

“Even though he has disappointment,” said Beatrice decidedly, “yet he has faith. Though he comprehend not, even so, he believes.”

Surendra made no reply, but he lifted his head from his hands, and drew himself straight in his chair, as though braced by Beatrice’s words.

“It is true that I have had trouble,” he said eagerly. “Not for my own pleasure would I thus have given distress and anxiety to the Sahib.”

“And this trouble, is it finished?”

The light died out from Surendra’s face. “For this time,” he said slowly, “the trouble is finished.”

“Have no fear, speak with the Sahib concerning this trouble,” advised Beatrice. But

Surendra sighed, shook his head, and rose to go. Left alone, Beatrice leaned back in her chair in a brown study. It was mid-April, even within the closely shuttered house Beatrice felt disinclined for exertion through the hot mid-day hours. The readings now took place in the early afternoons when the noon-day drowsiness had been dispelled with tea. It was still too hot to go into the compound. Beatrice lay back in her chair, reviewing again the incidents of the previous day, and absently watching the bearer, who, under the supervision of Ram Lall, was opening shutters and pulling up chiks.

"It is not suitable," she said aloud.

"Huzoor!" replied Ram Lall, standing before her, with an alacrity which suggested that he had been awaiting this opportunity.

"I called not, Ram Lall," returned Beatrice.

"The Memsahib is troubled," suggested the old chaprassi, lingering.

"True words," replied his Memsahib.

"The Memsahib troubles herself much for the matters of these people," continued Ram Lall. "The Memsahib does these folk much honour. That a Bara Memsahib should thus be troubled is not fitting."

"How thinkest thou, Ram Lall?" said Beatrice. "Is it fitting that the wife of Surendra Babu should, even as yesterday, walk in the road?"

“ It is not fitting that the Memsahib should wait on her pleasure, and at her summons rise up and go to her house,” said Ram Lall decidedly.

“ Nay, nay ! ” rejoined Beatrice. “ Concerning the deeds of the Memsahib, who shall speak praise or blame ? Is it fitting, I ask of thee, thou who knowest, is it fitting that the wife of a babu should walk as yesterday ? ”

“ Why should she not walk ? ” asked Ram Lall scornfully. “ As for me, I know nothing of the customs or the manners of these people. These babus be a worthless folk. Concerning them, let the Memsahib not trouble herself.”

“ Nay, Ram Lall ! ” said Beatrice soothingly. “ Tell me ! In the time of Lancaster Memsahib, how went the custom ? Did the wives of the babus not go to the pūrdah garden ? ”

“ How should they not go ? ” returned Ram Lall.

“ Yet after what manner went they, did they not, even as the wife of Surendra, walk ? ”

“ They walked,” admitted Ram Lall reluctantly. “ Yet not after the manner of the wife of Surendra.”

“ Tell me, Ram Lall, after what manner went they ? ” persisted the Memsahib.

Ram Lall coughed, scraped a meditative hand over a bristly chin, gave his huge gold-badged khaki puggaree an adjusting tug, and disposed himself for conversation. “ Since the days of

Lancaster Memsahib," he began with the deliberate diction which always made Beatrice long to seize him by the shoulders and shake the words out of him "Since the days of Lancaster Memsahib, this place is much changed."

"Yet where the purdah garden was in the days of Lancaster Memsahib, there it remains, even to this day," Beatrice reminded him.

"There it remains," agreed Ram Lall.

"And the roads to it to-day are the roads of the days of Lancaster Memsahib," pursued Beatrice.

"Of the roads, some be the roads of the time of Lancaster Memsahib," returned Ram Lall, "some, but not all."

"Oh!" cried Beatrice. "Not all! Tell me, Ram Lall! tell me of the changes."

"Behold!" said Ram Lall with a comprehensive wave of his hands. "Is not the whole place changed? In the time of Lancaster Memsahib, the houses of the babus, these houses the Memsahib knows, behold, they existed not! The babus dwelt in houses, alag, alag" (separate), dabbing a descriptive finger at imaginary sites in the air. "Each house had its own compound, its own gate. All round grew the jungle. As for the road, was it not in the very midst of the jungle?"

"Oh!" said Beatrice. "Then to come to the road, there was no passing....".

“The Memsahib’s words are true words,” broke in Ram Lall eagerly. “To come to the road, there was no passing of walls or of gates, neither was there any means of watching from upper rooms,” he added with a meaning nod.

“No watching from upper rooms,” repeated Beatrice, as the picture of a fluttering garment from the shutters of Romesh’s tower formed in her mind’s eye. Mentally she contrasted the the secluded paths traversed by Alice Lancaster’s guests with the spy-lined route, that gauntlet of invisible eyes, rustling garments, and quivering, listening walls of Binodini’s progress. “It is not fitting,” she said aloud.

“It is not fitting,” agreed Ram Lall. “Let the Memsahib make an end of such work.”

“And Lancaster Memsahib, herself, led these women from their houses to the garden?” asked Beatrice, ignoring Ram Lall’s advice.

“Those who went afoot, of a truth, they walked in the company of Lancaster Memsahib,” agreed Ram Lall.

“Those who went afoot!” repeated Beatrice, looking sharply at Ram Lall, whose eyes fell before hers. “Then there were other means? How else went they, Ram Lall?”

“How else but in palkis?” confessed Ram Lall.

“Palkis!” exclaimed Beatrice.

“How else?” returned Ram Lall, stroking the bristly chin. .

“Why spakest thou not to me of palkis?” asked Beatrice impatiently.

“Wherefore should I trouble the Memsahib with matters of palkis?” returned Ram Lall.

“What Lancaster Memsahib did, that cannot I do also?” asked Beatrice severely.

“Lancaster Memsahib was a Memsahib of great wisdom, a Bara Memsahib, indeed!” came the inevitable reply. “Moreover, her favour to these people was exceeding great.”

“What did Lancaster Memsahib, that may I do also,” said Beatrice, raising herself energetically in her chair. “Purchase for me a palki, Ram Lall.”

Ram Lall waved expostulating hands. “Let the Memsahib trouble not herself,” he said. “And wherefore speak of purchase? For the space of an hour, is not the hire of a palki eight annas?”

“Wherefore spakest thou not thus before?” exclaimed Beatrice.

“Except the Memsahib make inquiry, wherefore should I trouble her with such matters?” returned Ram Lall. “Behold, the Sahib!” he added as quick, firm footsteps sounded on the stairs.

Beatrice rose, and went to meet her husband. He wore a ruffled expression, and flung himself

into a long verandah chair with a gesture of irritation. Beatrice took a chair beside him. The sunshine slanted from the west, the faint puffs of hot wind gave hints of the coming of the south breeze. Below, the river glowed to bronze in the hot sunshine of the April evening. Over the river, the mills and chimneys glared, in their last hour of arid ugliness, before the glamour of the sunset should transform them, night drop her tender veil over them, and the lines of glittering lights resurrect them to palatial splendour. Beatrice laid a sympathizing hand on her husband's arm, and waited. It was the hour of the culminating irritation of the torrid day, when the hot airlessness of the shuttered house had become unbearable, while the verandah still radiated the stored-up heat of the noonday sunshine; when the south wind, as yet, only stirred the heavy air in faint, hot puffs, as irritating as futile; when the lethal spell of work was broken by weariness, yet discomfort denied rest, and fretfulness destroyed peace. Ram Lall, that respecter of customs, that man of understanding, brought a tantalus and iced drinks. He administered lemonade to the Memsahib, a peg to the Sahib. As though by his skilled agency, the south breeze ceased to puff and to promise, and set in in cool, steady earnest. The Sahib drank, and gave a satisfied sigh.

“What is it, dear?” asked Beatrice, setting down her glass.

“ Oh, that fellow Surendra, principally,” answered Weston impatiently.

“ What now ? ” asked Beatrice anxiously.

“ Oh, it’s all right now,” returned her husband. “ But, as you may guess, things are no better for his absence. That badli (substitute) of his is a poor stick, and now there are all sorts of muddles and pilferings coming to light in the dispensary. You know the sort of thing.”

Beatrice did. No collection of desirable goods in India, however small, can afford to be left without its lawful guardian. Household effects, drugs, the stores of a factory or shop, the appurtenances of a school, hospital, church, all become the prey of pilfering fingers, directly the vigilance of the responsible custodian is relaxed. Nor are there ever wanting enemies to saddle with the blame the occupant of a desirable position, such as that filled by Surendra. All day the Sahib had been bombarded with complaints, hints and innuendos, until even his just patience had been strained to breaking point. It was plain to the least observant that Surendra had an enemy.

“ He is awfully cut up about it,” said Beatrice, thinking of Surendra’s dejection at the reading. “ I am quite sure there’s been some family trouble,” she added.

“ Well, I hope to goodness it’s over,” said the Sahib. “ I declare, had he been anyone

else, I should have been on the point of dismissing him to-day."

Beatrice sat silent; it was absurd, but she could not shake off a feeling of responsibility for Surendra, and of guilt in respect of his shortcomings.

"By the way," said the Sahib, drawing a letter from his pocket, "I found this among my letters; looks like Mrs. Hammond's writing. Panchpahar post mark."

"Yes, she is in the hills," returned Beatrice.

"Open it, dear, no Eastern complications there, anyhow."

"Aren't there!" said Beatrice, laughing, as she read her letter. "Listen to this."

"Padre Bennett is here, as energetic as ever. He *says* he is engaged to Miss Brown, but I don't believe that she has formally accepted him. He is never weary of drawing highly coloured (locally coloured) pictures of the life of useful service they will lead together in Milor Bagan, but, do you know, I suspect Miss Brown of other plans. I think she would refuse the padre if he would only make a definite proposal. My husband's version of their relations is that the burly padre took our poor cousin by the nape of her neck (Hal calls it the scruff), and announced 'I engaged to marry you a month ago.' Hal swears that Miss Brown made no reply, for the simple reason that the padre emphasized his

tender declaration with a vigorous shake, and fled away upon his inevitable bicycle before she could protest. I give you the gist of Hal's exaggerations because, absurd as they are, they really do sum up the situation as it stands at present. Padre Bennett says he is about to marry Miss Brown. Miss Brown appears indignant and protesting, yet speechless.

"Padre Bennett's last scheme I hand on to you. It is really not in my line, and if you *must* hanker after natives, I think the padre's latest enthusiasm will really be a more suitable outlet for your energies than your poor husband's babus. Now, don't bristle, dear! It is difficult to write daintily of babus and habuesses (?), isn't it? Well, the latest jewel among the padre's black gems is one Mrs. Sen. I confess, even my hard heart bleeds for her. It is one of those tragic cases of a mixed marriage. She is a white woman, an Australian, married to this babu. I believe there is even a child! Ugh! Of course, she must be perfectly wretched. They only came to Milor Bagan just before we came here for the long vacation. I found her cards in my box, and couldn't for the life of me understand how anyone of such a name could have been calling on me. I had decided that the cards must have been intended for our dear cousin's box, when Padre Bennett came bustling in and enlightened me. He had been poking his providential finger into my pie, or, should I say, into my box? Hence the cards. I was really touched by the story, and would

have called, but in the bustle of packing I over-looked it.

“I fear I should have continued to forget Mrs. Sen, had not Padre Bennett tackled me again up here. Miss Brown is sadly shocked that I could have forgotten a Sen for the Smiths, Joneses and Robinsons of the ruling race. She is even more indignant that I could have imagined, for an instant, that Mrs. Sen’s cards were intended for her box! Altogether, between the importunities of Corydon and the reproaches of Phyllis, I am having a hot time. Were it not for my respect for the Church, I should quote Hal, and describe myself as between the devil and the deep sea.

“Have pity on me, and take the burden of my neglected duty upon your own enthusiastic shoulders. Do write and tell me how you get on. Poor soul! What a fate! Quite outside the pale of European society, of course, and, possibly, equally out of it with her husband’s people. Miss Brown is divided between the degrees of her indignation as to both these statements. Good-bye, dear. Let me know how you get on. The weather is perfect.”

“I wish those hill-wallas would make less splash about their weather,” growled the Sahib, mopping a damp brow.

“Well, Mrs. Sen comes at an opportune moment,” said Beatrice, springing to her feet. I believe an excuse for a run was just what I

needed. It has been a horrid day, hasn't it ? ”

“ It has,” agreed the Sahib.

“ Come, too,” suggested Beatrice, but the Sahib preferred to leave Beatrice to make her delicate investigations into this tragedy of a mixed marriage, alone.

The setting sun had already lit his red fires in the west, as the car turned into the jungle road. The road to Milor Bagan ran away from the sunlight towards the chaster light of the evening east. It plunged into the heart of the jungle, where the thick, green tangle of interlacing shrubs was pierced only here and there by stray rays of the setting sun. The feathery tufts of the tall palms showed black against the pale eastern sky, and the roads turned to long, dim rivers of purple colour as the light softened and faded. The first fine thread of a sickle moon was faintly traced on the fading sky. Tiny points of light betrayed the hidden stars. The sun sank lower, leaving the sky pale and unadorned, awaiting the spangled robe of night. And as the last red rays faded, the jungle awoke. The south breeze stirred the tufts of the palms, and shook the green curtain of lacing creepers. A chorus of birds broke into a pæan of praise. From hidden temples came the tinkle of bells, the clash of cymbals, the scream of conch-shells. High over all, floated the clear call of the Muazzin.

It was an hour which never lost its magic for Beatrice, nor ever failed to see the tide of

home-sickness and maternal longing roll up to the flood. For a second, her eyes filled with yearning tears, as the thin tinkle of the temple bells woke memories of richer chimes, and the clang of crude worship recalled the chants and melodies of holy hours. The chants and chimes gave place to little voices. Beatrice leaned back in the car, and nursery pictures floated before her closed eyes. Little forms pressed her limbs, little hands clasped and caressed.

As the car left the jungle, the dreams fled before the dusty roads and sordid traffic of Milor Bagan. Yet the glamour of the East was upon even these arid roads. The car fled past a long line of plodding buffalo-carts, crossed a railway line, left a burning-ghât on the one hand, a buzzing factory on the other, slipped past temples, churches, dissenting chapels and mosques, twisting and turning among centuries, creeds and races. Over the whole, mad, crowded scene, a fog of pungent dust. On every side, lights, as varied in degree as the buildings they illuminated. From the tall mills and sumptuous houses, the dazzling blaze of electric lights. From the roadside bastis, a feeble flare of smoking kerosine lamps, from the noisy temples the dim lights of tiny oil lamps, twinkling bravely through the cloud of scented incense. Along the centre of the long, dark road, a bright lane of light ran out from the headlights of the car, dimming the flickering glimmer of the swaying lamps beneath the bullock-carts.

Yet again, slowly moving, came the lights of flaring torches, or the swinging, yellow globe of a hurricane lantern, in the hands of pedestrians.

And the car rushed on, through old and new, until it turned in at the gates of a big, modern house, blazing with lights and gay with voices. A line of carriages stood waiting at the gate, strains of music and the buzz of conversation floated down from the drawing-room. Beatrice hesitated. This gay house was scarcely the expected scene of the tragedy of a mixed marriage.

Yes, this was the house of Sen Sahib, so a smartly attired chaprassi assured her. He took her cards with every ceremony, and escorted her to the drawing-room. She was greeted by a little lady, whose laughing face and smart apparel failed to suggest even tragedy bravely borne. The host, tall, stout, and very black of face, more nearly approached the picture for which Beatrice had been prepared. Both received her with hearty hospitality, but without a trace of the pathetic gratitude, which, subconsciously, Beatrice had been inclined to anticipate. So sharp was the reaction between anticipation and realization that she was almost inclined to be annoyed with the radiant Mrs. Sen, whose domestic tragedy she had been deputed to relieve. The drawing-room was crowded with visitors of all shades. Beatrice was welcome, but she was not a lion. She sat down by a lady in a rich sari, adorned with many jewels, and responded to her easy chat, until such

time as her hostess should find leisure to bestow upon her.

There was a bustle of departure, the guests were taking leave. Apparently, Mrs. Sen was on the eve of leaving Milor Bagan, for there were good-byes, and merry appointments for meetings in the hills. Presently, the tide of departure died down, and the flushed, smiling hostess came across to her latest guest.

"So sorry to be so long," she sparkled. "So good of you to come. Do forgive me, but I don't seem to remember"

Beatrice explained; "I live a long way out," she concluded, "and I confess I didn't know of your coming to Milor Bagan, until Mrs. Hammond wrote."

"Ah, yes, Mrs. Hammond," nodded Mrs. Sen brightly. "The wife of the Principal of the Institute. I know. I haven't met her."

"She is away," said Beatrice hastily.

"Every one is away," said Mrs. Sen gaily. "I go away myself to-morrow."

"And do you like Milor Bagan?" asked Beatrice.

Mrs. Sen made a merry grimace. "Not a case of liking," she said gaily. "My husband has an appointment here; he is managing the 'Delhi Works,' his father's place. Still, we are quite all right here, and I shall spend the hottest months away." She smiled gaily on

Beatrice. "And you," she continued, "are you not off to the hills?"

"No," said Beatrice. "I have not been long out, I hope to weather the heat this year."

"What! Not going away," came the high nasal notes of Mr. Sen, as he came towards them. "You have a stout heart, Mrs. Weston. Not one of the ladies of my family is here now."

Beatrice gasped. She had been accustomed to regard inability to stand the hot months as a Western peculiarity. She found herself vaguely annoyed at the idea of the host of female Sens refugeeing in the hills.

"And you live quite in the jungle," said Mrs. Sen softly. "It must be very dull for you."

"Oh, deadly," said Mr. Sen in genuine concern.

Beatrice's embarrassment was complete. She had come to comfort and remained to be compassionated.

"Have you any children?" asked Mrs. Sen, as a little girl came softly into the room and leaned against her mother.

"Is this your little girl?" asked Beatrice, forgetting Mrs. Sen's question in her surprise. The child was radiantly fair, not a surprising circumstance in her mother's child, but not at all the conventional dark result of the tragedy of a mixed marriage. The two women waxed

friendly over the little girl. Beatrice told of her absent family. Warm-hearted Mrs. Sen was moved well-nigh to tears. "Oh! you must often come to us. We must cheer Mrs. Weston up, mustn't we, Chuni?" she cried, as she embraced her little daughter.

"Until we return," said Mr. Sen fervently, as Beatrice rose to take her leave.

The car rolled back, through the pageant of carts, trams and carts, through the yellow-lighted canopy of smoke and dust. Beatrice smiled to herself at the tremendous surprise of her visit. Over dinner, she chased the lines from the Sahib's face and drew peals of laughter from his lips, as she sketched a graphic picture of her quest of domestic tragedy, and the warm-hearted compassion of the gay reality.

"But she *ought* to be a tragedy, you know," she concluded.

"I'm sure Mrs. Hammond will say so," said the Sahib.

CHAPTER X.

BEATRICE strolled round the purdah garden, Krishna clinging to her hand, Ram Lall in portly attendance. As she had expected, Binodini's latest excursion had been followed by a weary period of excuses, evasions and seclusion. Beatrice forebore to distress her friend with questions or reproaches. She bided her time. Meanwhile, it behoved her to display no slackening of her interest in the purdah garden. The watching jungle waited the moment when the vigilance of the malis should relax. Let the Memsahib cease to chide and direct, the malis to cut, prune and weed, and the green tide of the jungle would once again roll over the garden and its approaches, blotting out their very outlines, and shrouding them deep in a green veil of creepers. So the Memsahib guarded her garden until such time as the mystery should be revealed and Binodini's difficulties surmounted. At present, not even the seclusion of a palki would induce her to set foot outside her own house.

The news that the Memsahib had gone to the garden spread quickly through the factory quarters. The children came romping to the gate, eager to share the distinction of Krishna. Krishna looked at them doubtfully and made no motion to join them. There was a change,

too, in the attitude of the other children towards Krishna, they threw side glances at him and whispered among themselves. Failing to attract any notice, and seeing the Memsahib's attention divided between Krishna and the languid work of the malis, the children scampered out of the gate and went romping off towards the babus' quarters.

Beatrice continued her tour of the garden and her directions to Ram Lall. Krishna hung on her hand, and pressed closer to her side. Presently, there were tappings and whisperings outside the garden wall, the children had returned. The gate creaked, and the small, round head of the eldest hope of Romesh peered round it. There was a faint giggle from behind him, his head disappeared, and there was a scamper of flying feet. Ram Lall scowled, marched to the gate, locked it and pocketed the key.

"His mother is a memsahib!" came a thin, high voice. Krishna pressed closer to the Memsahib.

"His mother walks" but the gate flew open, and the children scampered off before the terrible vision of the angry Ram Lall. Without a word to the Memsahib, he pursued them to the distant gates, where he gave voice to stern admonitions, in tones calculated to reach the ears of the invisible occupants.

Krishna clung to the Memsahib's hand as they left the garden. He would not hear of

running alone through the bazaar. Trembling, his big, dark eyes brimming with tears, he drew on Beatrice's hand and implored her to come home with him. Beatrice hesitated, the hour was late for a visit to Binodini. On every side, the smoke of the cooking-fires rose from the little compounds. It was the hour sacred to the preparation of the evening meal. Still, Krishna begged and drew on her hand. Beatrice gave way and walked with him to his own door. She marked how the child shrank to her side and clung to her hand, she remembered that he no longer waited at her gate, nor came capering up to greet her in the bazaar.

"Come into my house. Make talk with my mother," he implored the Memsahib, as they stood before the closed door and jealously shuttered windows, Ram Lall in disapproving attendance.

"Thy mother does the work of cooking," said Beatrice, as Ram Lall, having rapped loudly on the door, slipped quickly back, lest at its opening his eyes should fall upon the face of the mistress of the house. There was no reply, Ram Lall rapped again. With a rattle of bolts and latches, the door swung slowly back. Krishna slipped in, pulling the Memsahib after him.

"What is there amiss, little mother?" cried the Memsahib, for Binodini stood before her in tears. She made no attempt to greet Beatrice, but, leaving Krishna to close and bolt the door, sank

upon the floor and bowed her face in her hands, in the posture from which she had been roused by Ram Lall's rap upon the door. Beatrice seated herself in the chair which Krishna drew away from the book-bestrewn table, and bent over Binodini. Krishna crept up to his mother, stroking her shoulders and striving to draw her sari from her face. Binodini's grief was not noisy; she sat motionless, her head bowed, the slow tears stealing down her cheeks. It was some time before Beatrice could get any reply to her anxious questions, or Krishna a response to his caresses.

"Tell me of thy grief," said Beatrice softly, as Krishna wiped the tears from his mother's face, and coaxed something like a smile from the trembling lips.

"Was it the talk?" asked Krishna in a shrill whisper, pointing an inquiring finger at the adjoining wall.

"Chup! Chup!" whispered back Binodini, putting a warning hand over the child's lips.

"I know," said Krishna, casting a side glance at the Memsahib. "Well then! Was it the letter?"

"It was the letter," replied his mother, looking relieved.

"Tell the Memsahib of the letter," suggested Krishna, still in his audible child's whisper.

“What is this talk of letters, little mother?” urged Beatrice.

“It is my mother-in-law,” said Binodini, still speaking in an undertone and casting apprehensive glances at the middle wall.

“How writes she?” asked Beatrice, dropping her own voice in response to Binodini’s anxious glances.

“That I am to go home, taking Krishna with me; thus does she write,” replied Binodini, rising from her crouching posture on the floor.

“And you have no wish to go?” asked Beatrice.

Binodini made no reply. It was almost six o’clock, the house with its low eaves and shuttered windows was in darkness. Binodini walked across to the table, above which hung a lamp. With neat, deft fingers, yet with rounded gestures, serenely free from haste or bustle, she took a box of matches from a shelf, struck a match and lighted the lamp. Beatrice marked the graceful curve of the raised arms, the supple bend of wrist and fingers, the calm ease of each action, as Binodini gently raised the wick. The mellow light of the lamp fell upon the upturned face, tear-stained still, but composed and sweet. The draping sari slipped from the tilted head, revealing the shining hair, gleaming ornaments and clear profile, in sharp relief against the shadowed wall. With a slow sweep of a roundly curved arm, Binodini drew the sari back to her head. Bending

over the table, she drew, from a pile of papers, the letter which she had made the excuse for her tears.

“To hearken to the words of my mother-in-law, is not that my duty?” she said, apparently in tardy reply to Beatrice’s question. “When she calls me, how shall I not go?”

“Then why do you weep?” asked Beatrice.

“Lest, having gone, they give her not to return,” said Krishna, wisely.

“Chi! Chi! Thou knowest nothing!” chided his mother gently. “Yet the child speaks true words,” she added, turning to Beatrice. “To go, that is no harm, but to remain . . .”

“But why remain? Go, and after a month come again,” said Beatrice.

“Behold, the Memsahib has knowledge concerning our customs. At the call of my mother-in-law, I go. When she shall send me, then shall I return.”

Beatrice remembered the former conversation, in which the lady of the wheaten countenance had taken so valiant a part. “But your husband, he is her son. She will send you back to him,” she exclaimed.

Binodini shook her head, and the tears brimmed up in her eyes.

Yet again, Beatrice felt that there was more than met eye or ear.

“Would the Memsahib read the letter?” asked Binodini, proffering a transparently thin sheet of paper, closely covered with spidery hieroglyphics.

“Read it to me, yourself, oh sister,” said Beatrice.

Binodini seated herself on the edge of the great, wooden taktaposh, and again swept the slipping sari to her head with a backward bend of her rounded arm. In the mellow light of the lamp, her face shone delicately clear as she bent over the closely written page.

“When I received thy letter,” read Binodini, “then with me was there joy and gladness, yet the news thereof was not to my profit, and therein was no joy. Why comest thou not to dwell in the house of thy father-in-law? Towards thy mother-in-law hast thou no love, is duty forgotten, is reverence no more? Behold, thy sisters-in-law, the wives of the brothers of thy husband, are they not even now at my side? Are their children not in my arms? Of Bipin there shall be a son, in the month of Kartik shall his wife give birth. Last year, apart from my side, there was trouble, and her son dead at the birth. This year, keeping her at my side, shall all go well. The wife of Rajendra stays with me, her son is sick with fever, and with a cough. Lo, I have sent him to Upendra Nath Chatterjee for treatment. As for the advice written by” here, Binodini hesitated,

and looked at the Memsahib. "It is the name of my husband" she stammered. "The Memsahib has knowledge. I may not speak it, the name of my husband."

"Speak it not! Speak it not!" whispered Beatrice, as Binodini's eyes glanced apprehensively at the dividing wall.

"As for the advice written by . . . by our doctor babu," resumed Binodini, "behold, when he was yet a babe, my mother-in-law, as also the mother of her husband, did they not hear the words and eat the physic of this man of wisdom and of piety?"

"Very small is the faith of my mother-in-law in the skill of my . . . of the doctor babu," commented Binodini, shaking her head and bending back her arm to restore the sari, displaced by the gesture.

"Read, little mother," said Beatrice, as Binodini paused and looked at her.

"Give to the Memsahib my greeting," resumed Binodini. "Very great is my desire to meet her. Touching the request of . . . of the doctor babu, that I come to his house, behold, my years are many and my strength is not. How shall I compass so great a journey? Yet, if with thee there is for thine own no love and no duty, thus it may be, that I, thus journeying, must even come to the house of my son. The master is still unwell. He reads much, many pages

does he write. Remember thy duty and come quickly.

"In the presence of the Almighty I make prayers for thy peace. Receive my benediction."

"Thus writes my mother-in-law," said Binodini, laying down the letter."

"Her desire for your going is great," said Beatrice, certain that the letter was not the sole explanation of Binodini's despair. "There is yet another, little mother," she added.

"It is from my sister," said Binodini, "from the house of my own father."

"Then, your sister has not yet made a marriage?" asked Beatrice.

"She is a widow," said Binodini.

"And she dwells in her father's house?" asked Beatrice surprised.

"For a little time, she stays in my father's house," said Binodini. "In the house of her father-in-law does she make her dwelling."

"Read, little mother," said Beatrice.

"For many days has this sorrowful one awaited a letter from the hand of her sister. Yet for that it comes not, therefore I write. Make not thine anger upon me, oh, my sister. Yet my mother bids me write to thee words concerning duty. Forasmuch as thy mother-in-law, greatly desiring thy presence at her side, calls thee, how

shalt thou turn thine ear from her call ? To go, is this not thy duty, oh my sister ? Behold, thou knowest it, since my thirteenth year have I dwelt thus, widowed and solitary. Oh ! had it but been written, had my husband remained at my side, how great would have been my care for him. As for his parents, for my father-in-law, as also for my mother-in-law, do I not even now, widowed and solitary, giving ear to their words, obey their commands ? Verily, I have heard that thy husband walks independently, a man of new ideas. Yet have a care, oh, my sister, forsake not the path of duty. Behold, before ever thou wast, did not thy mother-in-law tend and nourish her babe ? Shall he, whom she held an infant to her breast, forsake her in her old age ? Behold, is there any love like the love of a mother ? Know that since eight days have I dwelt in the house of our father. The master is well. As for our mother, with her all is not well, she has from time to time fever, and is weak. What more shall I write ?

“The great God make thy welfare.”

“And since her thirteenth year, has your sister been a widow,” repeated Beatrice.

“Since her thirteenth year ? said Binodini.

“And how goes it with her in the house of her father-in-law ?” asked Beatrice, touched to the quick by the pathetic piety of the prim little letter. “Do they show kindness towards her ?”

“ They show much kindness towards her,” said Binodini.

“ And does she live after the manner of a widow ? ” continued Beatrice.

“ In all respects, she lives after the manner of a widow,” said Binodini. “ Eating but once a day, wearing no jewels nor yet coloured garments, she spends many hours in prayer.”

“ Does she talk much ? Concerning these matters, how does she speak ? ” asked Beatrice,

“ She speaks little,” said Binodini. “ Widows may not make much talk. It is not our custom.”

“ Speaks she never of her husband ? ” asked Beatrice.

“ She speaks even as she writes,” returned Binodini. “ She says, ‘ Oh, that my husband had lived, how great would have been my care for him ! How great would have been my love for him ! ’ ”

“ And does she never leave the house ? ”

“ Save that from time to time her father-in-law sends her to the house of her father, she never goes out,” replied Binodini.

“ And her health, is she well ? ”

Binodini shook her head. “ With her there is much fever,” she replied, bending back her wrist and sweeping forward the truant sari.

“ And she spends her time in prayer ? ” repeated Beatrice.

“ Fasting, working, in silence and in prayer, thus she spends her days,” said Binodini, folding the letter.

“ And what is her age ? ” asked Beatrice.

“ Since five years has she been a widow,” said Binodini.

Not eighteen ! thought Beatrice, and sat silent. Pictures of the writers of the letters, and of their households, floated before her dreaming eyes. Through the medium of talks and letters, she seemed to know these people so well. The old father, his sturdy scepticism and tardy piety, his learning, his pride in his son, his distrust of the latter’s new ideas, and, to him, modern habits. The old mother, that woman of much belief, her fierce, exacting affection for the daughters-in-law of the house, her scorn of Surendra’s medical tenets, her jealous yearning over Binodini and Krishna. Now, she had made acquaintance with yet another member of this shadowy family, the pathetic shade of the widowed sister. Younger, by several years, than Binodini, yet a widow of five years’ standing, a wife perchance for a few weeks, then lifelong penance, ceaseless fasting, the silence of perpetual prayer.

“ Very beautiful is my sister,” Binodini’s voice broke the silence, as though bringing to a dramatic climax, Beatrice’s meditations. “ Very fair is she to look upon, so that in the house of my father-in-law she is called ‘ The memsahib.’ ”

“ At the time of writing, give my greeting to your sister,” said Beatrice, rising.

“ And you, little mother,” she added gently. “ Is it well with you ? ”

“ I am well,” said Binodini.

“ With me, there is hunger,” came the voice of Krishna, in accents whose disapproval equalled those of Ram Lall himself. Verily, the jeering accusations shouted after him in the bazaar were not without truth. Without doubt, talking with memsahibs, his mother forgot his food.

Beatrice started. “ It is my fault ! ” she exclaimed. “ I have prevented you. Sitting in your house, I have been as a hindrance in the way of your work. Pardon me, little mother,” and pausing not to hear Binodini’s remonstrances and denials, she hurried away.

As Beatrice passed along the line of babus’ houses, the children of Romesh came out of their gate and greeted the Memsahib with ceremonious courtesy. Bihari’s children stood at the end of the row, anxious for her notice. “ Honeyed lips and a poisoned heart,” muttered Ram Lall, administering a surreptitious shake to the son of Romesh, as the Memsahib bent down to answer the greeting of Bihari’s children.

“ Take heed, lest I, even I, give you teaching of customs. Let me but hear, as to-day, thy evil talk in the presence of the Memsahib”

“ Never ! Never ! ” whispered Romesh’s son, his black eyes round with fear. “ Upon Krishna, we made our derision. It was but a joke. The Memsahib heard us not. How should we deride the Memsahib ? ”

“ Have a care how thou deride Krishna,” cautioned Ram Lall, as he followed the Memsahib.

“ What spakest thou with the son of Romesh, Ram Lall ? ” asked Beatrice, as she hurried on.

“ Concerning the danger of double-dealing did I speak with him,” returned Ram Lall darkly.

“ Heard I not the name of Krishna ? ” pursued the Memsahib.

“ Shall anything be hid from the Memsahib ? ” returned Ram Lall.

“ Is not everything hid from the Memsahib ? ” exclaimed Beatrice. “ Make these matters plain, Ram Lall.”

“ Concerning what manner of matters does the Memsahib speak ? ” asked Ram Lall cautiously.

“ Saw you not in the garden how Krishna drew upon my hand, and feared to play with his companions ? ” asked Beatrice, slowing down her walk, until Ram Lall was but a single pace behind her.

“ I saw,” said Ram Lall.

“Seest thou not how late I come from the house of Surendra, from the side of the mistress? Behold, even now, at this hour, in that house no cooking-fire burns.”

“I know,” said Ram Lall. “Further, not for the first time does the mistress of that house sit in tears, forgetting her cooking.”

“Yet she is a good mother,” protested Beatrice.

“She is a pearl among women,” returned Ram Lall.

“Then, what is the trouble? What are these matters she hides from the Memsahib?” pursued Beatrice. “Hast thou seen aught?”

“I have seen much,” returned Ram Lall.

“Then show me these hidden matters,” said Beatrice imperiously. “I also would see.”

“The Memsahib would see with her eyes?” chuckled Ram Lall. “Hearing with her ears, she would see with her eyes also?”

“Without doubt,” returned Beatrice.

“Yet who can bring these matters before the eyes of the Memsahib, do they not flee before her presence?”

“Yet they be known to her chaprassi,” said Beatrice impatiently.

“Behold! From the chaprassi of the Memsahib are such matters also hidden, even as from the Memsahib herself,” said Ram Lall. “Not as the chaprassi of the Memsahib have I seen.”

"Thou speakest in riddles," said Beatrice impatiently. "Make thy words plain, Ram Lall."

"Has the Memsahib not seen how the children cease their mischief and flee before this uniform," asked Ram Lall importantly, pointing a proud finger at the various gold-braided devices scattered over his portly person.

"Without doubt," said Beatrice, smiling, despite her anxiety, at the recollection of the stampede from the garden gate.

"Not in this attire do I obtain knowledge of hidden matters," said Ram Lall, shaking his puggareed head.

"Oh! A disguise?" said Beatrice.

"Even so," said Ram Lall. "If the Memsahib would, even as her servant, see these matters which be hidden, let her walk in the same road."

"Thy words are words of wisdom," said Beatrice. As she spoke, they passed through the gate. A few yards from the house, Ram Lall paused, looked anxiously to right and left for possible eavesdroppers, and broke into a hurried whisper.

"To-morrow, at 8 o'clock, let the Memsahib come into the compound," said Ram Lall, in a low, guttural whisper. "Let her put upon her the garments of her ayah. Let not the ornaments for the feet and for the arms be

forgotten. Behold, to-morrow at eight, I will, in this place, await the coming of the Memsahib."

"I will come," said Beatrice.

"Thus shall the hidden matters be made plain," promised Ram Lall. "Moreover," he added, "the time is well chosen, for to-morrow Surendra Babu abides not at home."

"What!" cried Beatrice.

"It is known to all," said Ram Lall. "This day has the Sahib given leave, Surendra Babu goes again to his home."

In the light of Ram Lall's revelations, Beatrice was not surprised to find the Sahib awaiting her, in anything but a serene frame of mind.

"It's that fellow Surendra again," he replied to his wife's inquiries. Beatrice said nothing of Ram Lall's revelations.

"How long will he be away?" she asked.

"Oh! I have only given him one day," returned the Sahib. "And I've made it pretty plain that the performance isn't to be repeated."

Beatrice said nothing to her husband of her engagement with Ram Lall for the following evening. She had known, when she consented to the old chaprassi's scheme, that a bachelor dinner, in Milor Bagan, would secure the Sahib's absence before 8 o'clock. Nor was it necessary for her to follow Ram Lall's directions to the point of taking her ayah into her confidence.

The necessary sari and ornaments were ready to hand, relics of bygone theatricals and fancy-dress dances. Thus, on the following evening, taking a black sari from her store, Beatrice draped it skilfully over her thin dress, covered the whole with a big dust cloak, and slipped the jingling ornaments into her pocket. Thus covered and unadorned, she stole downstairs and into the compound unobserved. In the dark compound, she slipped the bangles on to her arms; the heavy silver anklets, with their tiny bells, over her stockinged feet. Rolling the dust cloak into a bundle, she handed it to Ram Lall, who awaited her, his uniform covered with a carefully draped dhoti, and carrying a long staff in his hand.

“If I go first, that will be well for the Mem-sahib,” suggested Ram Lall, casting an inquiring glance at Beatrice.

Beatrice understood that she was to appear in the bazaar as a native woman, walking humbly in the shadow of her lord.

“It will be well,” she replied without any hesitation.

Ram Lall nodded approval, and began a slow-paced progress through the compound, casting anxious, backward glances at the Memsahib.

With bowed head and sari-shrouded face, her white hands carefully concealed in the folds of her garments, Beatrice followed close upon his heels, bangles and anklets jingling as she walked.

Slowly they came through the compound to the gate. Beatrice's heart beat a little faster, suppose the durwan stopped them. But Ram Lall had not played the part of an amateur detective without acquiring experience. There was no guardian of the gate. They passed through the gate, along the jungle road, and so into the bazaar. The bazaar was a babel of voices and laughter, every shop a-buzz with buying and selling. At the far end of the lighted line of shops was gathered a little crowd of shouting children. Their rapid gabble of words was indistinguishable to Beatrice, but the stiffening of Ram Lall's shoulders told her that the centre of that crowd concealed one of the hidden things that was to be made plain that night. This passage through the bazaar had been to Beatrice, as to Ram Lall, the supreme bogie of the expedition, the crucial test of her disguise. But as the occupants of shop after shop turned indifferent eyes upon the common spectacle of a stolid wayfarer, followed by a shrinking, sari-veiled woman, Beatrice's confidence increased, and she began to notice that the interest of buyers and sellers was concentrated, not upon herself, or indeed in the bazaar at all, but was directed at a point in the distance. Peeping through her thin sari in the direction of the pointing fingers, she saw a group of babus, gathered under the shuttered windows of Surendra's house. Leaving the bazaar cautiously, and by devious ways skirting the high wall

surrounding the compound of Romesh's house, she followed Ram Lall towards the line of babus' houses. Opposite Surendra's house, in the shadow of Romesh's high wall, Ram Lall paused. The babus were standing, a little giggling group, under the window of the room furthest from Bihari's house.

"Ha! Ha!" came the thin, high tones of Romesh. "The memsahib remains not in the inner apartments this evening."

"Nay! Lest there be news or notes," cried another voice.

"Or, perchance a visitor at the door!" chimed in a second.

"Waiting, she sits near the outer door," finished a third.

"Nay, she is a memsahib, how should her face be hidden! What need has she of modesty?" piped Romesh.

"Modesty!" cried his echo. "Shall a walker of bazaars lack modesty!"

There was a general laugh.

"Where is Surendra Babu to-night?" asked another voice.

"Sits he at the side of the Bara Sahib?"

"Nay, he flees from stale rice. By proud looks and the friendship of memsahibs is a man's belly not filled."

"For the sake of a meal is Surendra gone to the house of his father."

There was another laugh.

“ Since when has the memsahib forsaken the inner rooms ? ” asked the echo.

“ Since walls have tongues and speaking, speak truth,” squeaked Romesh.

Above the hum of the bazaar, there rose a shrill clamour of children’s voices, which grew noisier and drew nearer, until Beatrice saw, come running across the tiny common, a little flying figure, followed by a crowd of shouting, jeering children.

“ His mother becomes a memsahib ! ”

“ A memsahib ! ”

“ His mother walks the bazaars ! ”

“ Shows her face in the streets ! ”

“ He eats stale rice ! ”

“ Stale rice ! ”

“ Stale rice ! ”

The little, panting, sobbing figure brushed against Beatrice, and forgetting alike disguise and discretion, she threw out her arms, and gathered the little, trembling Krishna to her breast.

In an instant, Ram Lail threw off the dhoti and stood before the dumfounded children, terrible in the uniform of the chaprassi of the Bara Sahib. With united yells of horror, they dispersed, and went tearing off to seek the shelter of their respective homes. Under cover of the hullabaloo of their junior accomplices, the babus

slunk away, to endeavour, by the chastisement of their progeny, to avert attention from their own misdemeanours. Ram Lall strode up to Surendra's door and knocked loudly. Beatrice, leading the still sobbing Krishna, followed. Ram Lall knocked, and knocked again, but there was no reply. Krishna, sobered by alarm, signed to Beatrice and ran round to the other door. Presently, there was a rattling of bolts and the door flew open. The place was in darkness, Binodini was not to be seen. The house was filled with the choking fumes of kerosine oil. Krishna, wild with terror, rushed from room to room, shouting his mother's name. Beatrice, silent, but no less terrified, followed him. Ram Lall cautiously opened the door and peered in.

"Let the Memsahib search the compound and the outhouses," he growled, as Beatrice and Krishna came through the outer room, in the course of their hunt. Krishna flew out through the verandah and into the compound. Beatrice was following him, when her eye fell upon what appeared to be a heap of white garments, at the far corner of the dark verandah. Fearfully, she crept up to the heap. Trembling, she put out a shaking hand, and touched a sodden garment.

The smell of kerosine was overpowering. Taking courage, she pressed gently, the heap was solid. She drew nearer, and heard the sound of hurried breathing.

“ Little mother ! ” she whispered softly.

The heap stirred, shuddered, and resolved itself into the figure of Binodini, sitting crouched upon the ground, her head bowed low between her knees, her garments dripping with kerosine oil. By her side, matches and an extinguished lamp. Shuddering, Beatrice flung the matches to the far side of the verandah and bent afresh over Binodini.

“ Come, little mother,” she whispered, “ these garments be damp.”

Drawing Binodini to her feet, she began to unwind the dripping sari, which, but for her timely arrival, would have been a fiery shroud, from the trembling limbs of the young wife. Her task ended, she wrapped Binodini in her own black sari, and running into the outhouse, which served as a bathing place, she flung the deadly garments into a huge, standing tub of water. Sending Binodini into the inner room, she sent Krishna in search of food. He returned with a brass pot, containing milk. Sighing for that infallible panacea of the feminine west, a cup of tea, Beatrice, mindful of caste restrictions, directed Krishna to pour a little of the milk into a cup. Deftly the little fellow obeyed, and with caresses and entreaties coaxed his mother to drink. Binodini sipped the milk, but she was deadly cold, and her eyes stared at Beatrice in dumb alarm. Beatrice chafed the cold hands, coaxed, petted and finally, in desperation, scolded. Her

sharp words acted like a stimulant. The fixed stare softened, the staring eyes fell before Beatrice's stern gaze. Binodini caught her breath, stirred, and rose unsteadily to her feet. As she stood, swaying weakly, leaning on Beatrice's protecting arm, there was a loud rap at the door.

“ Surendra Babu,” announced Ram Lall.

[Surendra entered. The sight of his wife's ghastly face, her trembling form, the supporting Memsahib, above all, the still overpowering odour of kerosine, gave him the climax, if not the details, of the story. He made one stride forward, and took his wife in his arms. Binodini fell sobbing upon his breast in a flood of healing tears. And so, Beatrice left them, satisfied that Binodini would meet with understanding and sympathy. It was no slight emotion that could move a Bengali husband to forget the domestic etiquette which forbade him to address his wife in the presence of strangers, which indeed, decreed that he should not even perceive the presence of a female guest.

“ Let those who make their insults upon the friends of the Bara Memsahib, look well to themselves,” said Beatrice in clear, distinct tones, as she stood under Bihari's shuttered windows.

“ The orders of the Memsahib shall in all respects be obeyed,” thundered Ram Lall, as they passed under the high wall of Romesh's compound.

“ Let there be for my friends no annoyance,” said Beatrice, raising her voice. “ See thou to it, Ram Lall.”

“ Ill shall it go with them that give offence,” growled Ram Lall. “ Of a truth, it is a matter for the police folk, the work of this night.”

“ Yet, except I give the order, thus far forbear, oh, Ram Lall,” came the voice of the Memsahib.

There was a scuffle of pattering, bare feet on the flat roof of Romesh’s house. A white garment fluttered out from an upper window. The Memsahib and her chaprassi walked homewards, the Memsahib footsore in her stockinged feet and heavily burdened ankles, yet well pleased with the night’s work.

CHAPTER XI.

It was early June, the scorching, breathless period before the breaking of the Rains. Beatrice lay back in her long chair upon the verandah, too languid, even at six of the evening, to go down into the compound. Not a breath stirred the heavy air. There was no hope of the south breeze, that welcome evening visitor of April and early May. Night brought little relief. If the days scorched and glared, the darkness was heavy and stifling. Even the breeze from the whirling electric fan seemed to give little alleviation. The river lay shrunken between the bare mud banks, only stirred to life by the passing steamers. A black pall of smoke hung above the ugliness of the opposite bank of the river, whose arid panorama of mills and chimneys the sun still blazoned forth.

Beatrice closed her eyes in a sick weariness. A deep despondency was upon her soul. It was a full fortnight since her nocturnal visit to Binodini, and still the mystery which oppressed her friend eluded her. She had visited, gently questioned, exchanged notes and books, but still Binodini faded and drooped. Surendra's face was anxious and care-worn. He was absent and inattentive at the Bengali lessons, Beatrice's

blunders passed unheeded unless she detected them herself.

Krishna again haunted the big gate, and prattled to the durwans and to Ram Lall. He no longer showed any fear of the children as he walked, clinging to the Memsahib's hand, along the jungle road. But the shadow of care was upon the little household. It was plain, too, that Binodini had not recovered from the shock of that terrible evening. Beatrice knew that she had been thoroughly successful in putting down the persecutions of the babus and the children. She had kept a durwan posted about the common. Ram Lall was known to be capable of emerging at any moment from the most improbable disguises, to be liable to appear on the least desirable situations. The heavy footsteps of a patrolling durwan were apt to thud, thud past Bihari's windows whenever the delicate subject of his next door neighbours' affairs was under discussion. Binodini no longer lowered her voice, or cast anxious glances towards the inner wall, as she talked with Beatrice.

There was no cooling of Binodini's affection towards the Memsahib, she was pathetic in her gratitude, she had even, in the safe shelter of a palki, paid one or two visits to the purdah garden. The visits were short, very scrupulous was Binodini concerning the preparation of the evening meal. Not for any pleasure or amusement might the smoke of her cooking-fire rise later than that from the compounds of her

neighbours. The accusation of stale rice, and the consciousness of the truth of the reproach, had cut deep into Binodini's conscientious heart. No, the trouble no longer had its roots in the jealousy of the neighbours, there was something more.

And how far was the trouble of the Memsahib's making? Had not all the bitter jibes against Binodini, the cruel persecution of Krishna, arisen solely from the Memsahib's connection with the little household? Beatrice looked back, contrasting in her anxious mind the present condition of Binodini with the calm serenity of the little household, as she had first known it. How peacefully free from care she had found the two little women, how untiring in duty, how serene in sacrifice. Had the coming of the restless West destroyed the calm of Eastern peace? Was this the sum of the Memsahib's efforts and prayers, the harvest of her sowing of love,—this withering blight on an Eastern Arcadia? Was Alice Lancaster wrong, or was she, Beatrice, as Ram Lall had so often hinted, incapable of following wisely in the footsteps of the Memsahib of wisdom, that Bara Mem indeed? Was Hammond right? Was her friendship really to work only bitterness and wrong to Binodini? Would she yet find the doors of her friend's house closed against her?

“Behold, a certain babu stands below, and would speak with the Memsahib.” Beatrice started, as the disapproving tones of Ram Lall

broke in upon her meditations. "Let him come," said Beatrice absently, her mind still deep in the affairs of Surendra's household.

Ram Lall grunted an order to some person below ; there was a clatter of loose-shod feet upon the stairs, and the bowing, smirking countenance and portly figure of Romesh appeared.

"Romesh Babu !" exclaimed Beatrice, effectually wakened from her brown study. Treading delicately as a like hypocrite of old, and casting furtive glances from side to side, as became one who had specialized in eavesdropping, Romesh approached the Memsahib.

"What is your business, Romesh Babu ?" asked Beatrice coldly.

Romesh bridled and ogled, and proceeded to tune his vocal chords to the requisite shrillness, with the throat-scraping cough, which precedes a certain class of Bengali eloquence.

"The Memsahib will . . er ."—scrape, scrape—"er . . er . . fabricate her excuses for my intrusions" minced Romesh, in his emasculate, tinny tenor ; "but er . . er . . to my eternal desolations, I am propelled to make certain avocations in regard for one certain individual person . . er . . er"—scrape, scrape—"in this place."

"Indeed," said the Memsahib coldly.

"The Memsahib is acquainted with"—scrape, scrape—"with er . . er . . flat fact of . . er . .

er . . existence to my er . . er . . ”—scrape, scrape—“establishment of topmost tower.”

“Oh ! your upper room,” said Beatrice despite herself, letting a gleam of interest escape from her carefully chilly eye.

“My er . . . er . . ”—scrape, scrape—“my upstarted room,” agreed Romesh.

“Well ? ” asked Beatrice.

“As is perceptible to your Honour, Madam”—scrape, scrape—“the windows of one specialized individual to . . er . . er . . ”—scrape, scrape—“to nominate no unmentionables.”

“You mean Surendra Babu,” said Beatrice uncompromisingly.

“Madam has er . . er . . ”—scrape, scrape—“accomplished the nomination,” squeaked Romesh, lifting his fat hands from his portly paunch, in deprecation of such indelicate frankness. “It is not for me to . . er . . er . . ”—scrape, scrape—“to make refutation of Madam’s pronounciations.”

“Romesh Babu, what do you wish to tell me?” asked Beatrice impatiently.

“I telling whatsoever nothing !” returned Romesh with inadvertent truth.

“Then why waste my time ? ” said Beatrice severely.

“ If Madam will mercifully permissing the necessaryful loquaciousness for sweetly shortly space of a single seconds ”

“ Oh, Romesh Babu ! say what you have to say,” gasped the irritated Memsahib.

“ Madam, I have to say er . . er . . .”—scrape, scrape—“ that the er . . er . . summit of my house, as also my uplifted chamber, is in full visibility of the obtruding house of Surendra Babu.”

“ So I have observed,” returned Beatrice significantly.

“ This er . . er . . unpropitious er . . er . . approximation of the er . . er . . .”—scrape, scrape—“ of the residential dwelling house of Surendra Babu, is the excessive inconveniency of my family.”—scrape, scrape.

“ How so ? ” asked the Memsahib quietly.

Romesh came a step closer, making, as he did so, a still more thorough search for possible eavesdroppers.

“ For the procuration of coldness,” he began in a hoarse whisper, “ I am in the”—scrape—“ in the”—scrape—“ . . in the er . . er . . nocturnality making slumberations upon the anterior top of my house.”

“ You mean you sleep on the roof,” said Beatrice.

Again Romesh raised his hands from his paunch, in modest deprecation of these verbal

indelicacies. He acknowledged the cold truth of the brutally simple statement with a pained bow.

“Well ?” asked Beatrice.

“When, at the occasional sometimes, my unrespecting family are in unconscious innocency, then this bad man, Surendra, performs perfidious examinations with telescopic spectacles.” Romesh bent forward, that he might make certain of the words reaching the Memsahib’s ear, and going no further. His round eyes were starting from his fat face, his podgy hands and stumpy fingers spread outwards on either side of his portly person, in illustration of the astonishing enormity of Surendra’s conduct.

“Telescopic spectacles !” exclaimed the puzzled Beatrice. “Oh ! you mean field-glasses.”

A shrug of the fleshy shoulders, a straining of rounded eyeballs, a wave of modest hands, intimated the coy reluctance of Romesh for plain statements.

“By these mean glasses”—scrape, scrape—“this bad man does perform investigations into the shuddering bosom of my private families,” concluded Romesh.

“Am I to understand ?” said the thoroughly exasperated Memsahib, sitting up straight in her chair, and glaring at the astonished babu, hitherto too congenially absorbed in the mouthing and multiplying of syllables to observe the growing distaste on his hearer’s face. “Am I to

understand that you accuse Surendra Babu of spying upon your private family life ? ”

Romesh's hands fluttered violently, in his efforts to signal the desirability of discreetly guarded speech. “ Oh, no, no ! ” he stammered.

“ But you do ! ” said Beatrice severely. “ You accuse this babu of spying. You call him a bad man ! Let me warn you to be careful how you speak of my friends, Romesh Babu ! ” and the Memsahib rose to her feet, formidable in her scorn and wrath. The miserable Ramesh, who had taken silence for assent throughout the interview, shrank into a quivering heap of disconsolate fat.

“ The Memsahib's many mercifully pardons begging, ” he stuttered.

“ Take care ! Romesh Babu, ” repeated the Memsahib.

“ Not so exactly in this manner will I in future offend, ” murmured Romesh, backing towards the stairs.

“ See that you don't, ” said Beatrice. “ As for the roof, that shall be put right, Romesh Babu. *There shall be no more spying,* ” she added significantly. Here, Ram Lall, that man of understanding, that comprehender of tones and voices, appeared, and, with a look of unconcealed disgust, beckoned to the crestfallen Romesh and marshalled him down the stairs.

“What did that sanctimonious old humbug want here?” asked the Sahib, who had passed the apologetic portliness of the defeated Romesh on the stairs.

Still flushed and bright-eyed with righteous anger, Beatrice gave her husband the outlines of Ramesh’s attempt to play providence.

“A sure proof of the guilt he is trying to cover up,” commented the Sahib.

“I wish we could punish him,” said Beatrice.

“We can do even better,” said the Sahib. “We can mete out to him cold, impartial justice, and relieve your friends in the opposite house of all annoyance, to boot.”

“Oh, how?” asked Beatrice.

“I have had my doubts about the safety of that upper room for some time,” said the Sahib. “I’m pretty sure there’s no immediate danger, still, I see many reasons for making certain at once, and I’m quite sure the result will be the removal of that upper room, with the staircase, to the roof. In view of Romesh’s complaints, I shall send for him to-morrow, and acquaint him with my benevolent intentions. His room and his roof will only be accessible to the bats and the dicky-birds by to-morrow evening.”

“How splendid!” said Beatrice.

“Splendid for the whole neighbourhood,” said the Sahib. “Romesh is a local tyrant. He

has appointed himself a malevolent providence in that watch-tower of his."

"A letter," broke in Ram Lall. "The peon has even now brought it."

"The Milor Bagan evening post," said Beatrice, stretching out her hand for the letter. "Panchpahar post mark! Alice Lancaster!" she exclaimed joyfully.

"You poor, weary child!" wrote Alice Lancaster. "Your letter breathes depression and discomfort from every syllable. Yet, why so discouraged, dear? You are winning all along the line! But I know that Hot Weather despair. How I wish I could send you a breath of the cool air of Panchpahar, or even a shower of our too abundant rain. Pictures of forgotten Junes peep out between the lines of this latest chapter in your Great Adventure. I sit again in the verandah, and look at the incongruous ugliness, across the shrunken, brown river. I see the heavy pall of smoke, and feel the oppression of the still, hot air. At the mere recollection of the scene, my spirits sink, and my courage shrinks. My dear Beatrice, until the Rains break, it is a trial to be with you, even in spirit. I must shake off these sultry, smoky memories, and try to send you something of help and cheer from the hills.

"Seriously, dear, apart from the inevitable burden of climate, why so discouraged? Certainly, you have been through stirring scenes

in your little world, but how marvellously the tangle has straightened out before Western energy and perseverance. Good old Ram Lal! He always was my right hand, and a born detective. Binodini's story might easily have been a terrible tragedy, but, my dear, don't be too ready to take upon yourself the responsibility for her despair. Be sure that, much as you have discovered, there is yet more behind to explain the poor little woman's depression. Bengali women are supersensitive and peculiarly ready to despair. Their courage in respect of suicide is marvellous. Kerosine-soaked garments and a lamp supply the solution of many a domestic problem, as the vernacular newspapers testify. The whispers through the walls, the jeers under the windows, Krishna's baby reproaches, no doubt these were all factors in the case, and looking deep down into the blackest side of the matter, you may put the blame on the jealousy aroused by your attentions to Surendra's household.

"As for the gloomy prophecies of Mr. Hammond, it lies with you, whether they are to prove right or wrong. Falter now, and undoubtedly you will leave Surendra's family a hundred times worse off than you found it. You have taught Binodini to need interests outside her little home. You have awakened a very responsive heart to wider affections. You have made her conspicuous among her fellows, and, in a manner, put her to the test. Your friendship with Binodini is as

much an experiment in the eyes of all her watching neighbours as it is to yourself and to the disapproving Mr. Hammond. Persevere, and, unless I am greatly mistaken, the result of your efforts will be the breaking down, in a great measure, of the barrier between East and West in your little locality. Remember, you started out to take a risk, prepared for disappointment. Yet, is the result of your venture all disappointment? True, you have not Binodini's full confidence, and Surendra is certainly concealing some family difficulty. But can you reasonably expect implicit confidence from these people? For the first time, in their experience, they find Europeans offering sympathy, and demanding confidence. Can you blame them if they do not rush to meet such unprecedented advances? Rather, is it not wonderful that you have met with neither coldness nor ingratitude? After all, your friends have a right to their reserve.

“Do not expect to know everything, it was love you invested in this venture, not curiosity. Make up your accounts if you will, and you will find a big balance of love to your credit. Look at the matter with the calculating eye of cold common-sense, and, even so, you must confess that, if so entirely novel an enterprise show ever so tiny a margin of profit, you are marvellously repaid. Persevere! You have put your hand to the plough and you *cannot* turn back. In that tiny corner of Bengal, you stand for British prestige. You have, in your own person, put

Western honour, loyalty, the religion of Christ itself, to the test. If you falter now, you have proved, to the satisfaction of the watching community round you, the impenetrability of the barrier between East and West. You have demonstrated the impossibility of the smallest relaxation of the purdah system. You have decided the fate of the little women in that row of thatched houses, and the fates of their daughters and their sons' wives. One can almost hear the admonitions of the disillusioned ladies to their progeny. 'Take heed how you give ear to new ideas. Behold there came to this place a memsahib.' Binodini will be held up to unborn generations as the awful example of a Bengali woman, who, for a brief space, consorted with memsahibs and, neglecting her house, walked abroad, and sought pleasures without the safe precincts of her home. The inevitable sequel of the weariness of the fickle memsahib, the cessation of her favours, the relapse of the purdah garden to jungle and neglect, will point the moral of the fatal error of putting one's trust in memsahibs, and forsaking old customs for new. It will be added that, in that very garden, two memsahibs have tried this experiment.

"No, my dear Beatrice, you can't and you won't turn back. Take heart ! Continue to take risks. Take the risk even of deception. Better be deceived than without beliefs. And our ideal is the love that believes all things. Bring the warmth of your love, the power of your belief, to

bear upon the reserve of Surendra. You did well when you assured him of the faith of the Sahib. Now it is for you to stiffen his super-sensitive, malleable Eastern mind with your Western energy and dogged British endurance. The Bengali is so ready to despair. He can raise up for himself a super-excellent standard of duty, decorate it with the loftiest ideals, the most poetic fancies, and suffer it to fall upon him and crush him, without so much as an opposing gesture. He can utter scepticisms, avow advanced views, even venture a few steps from traditional custom in actual practice, but the first beckoning of the autocratic maternal finger calls him back to superstition and to submission. Surendra has come to a difficult corner. He is torn between his conception of duty and his desire for progress. I suspect monetary difficulties. It is even possible, a full knowledge of the circumstances might not help you at all. Certainly, at present, appearances are against him, and Mr. Hammond's gloomy predictions seem in a fair way to be fulfilled, but from what you tell me of Surendra I am sure the trouble is due to no real fault on his part.

“Stick to your friends, persevere, and pray; and, Beatrice, pray, believing that you shall receive. *I don't believe in speculative prayer.* It is plainly either an energy which we put forth from our own personalities, something which demands long continued effort, or it becomes a mere feeble sentiment, a last resource

when better understood methods have failed. Well, dear, cheer up, with the breaking of the Rains, will come refreshment and new energy, and, I feel it in my bones, before the end of the Cold Weather, we shall know more of this mystery. Cheer up, dear.

“As for Romesh, there is a Romesh in all these stories. He is a terrible Eastern incarnation of our old enemy, ‘Mrs. Grundy.’ Persevere, and I venture to prophesy that Romesh and his watch-tower will vanish before the determination of the memsahib.”

“That little prophecy will be fulfilled tomorrow,” said the Sahib, as he handed the letter back to his wife. “And whence hails the other envelope?”

“Panchpahar, again,” said Beatrice. “Mrs. Hammond’s writing. ‘Now for a contrast.’—

“Dear Mrs. Weston,

“It was good of you to call on Mrs. Sen for me, but, you wretch! why didn’t you warn me? From the time I heard from you that they were coming up, I kept an eye on the visitors’ list, so that I should lose no time before calling on the poor creature, when she arrived. Poor creature, indeed! Oh, you wretch!

“I wore my most ancient garments and tramped through the dust, so as to appear friendly and homely. I confess I had been a little surprised by the address, for ‘Hazlewood’ is quite one of the catches of the station. I put

the Sens down as paying guests, and hoped that Mrs. Sen would not have to receive me in her bedroom. Once again, you wretch !

“ I arrived, in my dusty, old garments, to find a smart garden party in full swing. You know ‘ Hazlewood ’ boasts one of the few lawns in Panchpahar. The garden and drawing-room were full of smartly dressed people. There were people of all shades and grades, people before whom I wouldn’t have appeared in old gloves, for a fortune. On the other hand, there was a whole crowd of natives of both sexes, Brahmos I suppose. I have never before seen such a display of lovely saries. Of course, Mrs. Sen must *really* be wretched, and Sen himself was even blacker than my fancy painted him. Then the child ! She ought to be as black as ink, but these Australian women seem capable of arranging anything ! I wished I had happened to find Mrs. Sen alone. She *must* be unhappy, and all this show and gaiety must be just display to hide her misery. All the same, isn’t it all just of a piece with Padre Bennett’s schemes ! He is always working us up to a perfect panic of wasted sympathy over some philanthropic bee in his prolific bonnet. (This is Hal’s eloquence, not mine.)

And now, for the great sensation of the Panchpahar season ! Our cupboard is empty, our cousin is Miss Brown no more ! She and Padre Bennett were at that very tea party, as much one as the Church can make them. Married,

my dear! Just down from a honeymoon trip to the snows. Padre Bennett's enthusiasms may need cooling occasionally, but how he dared cool Miss Brown's frosty feelings to such a point beats Hal's comprehension. The padre assures us that, throughout his honeymoon, he was so cold that you might have run pins into any portion of his person, and he wouldn't have perceived your unkindness.

"Whether Miss Brown's prenuptial tendernesses had suggested the necessity for such desperate precautions on the honeymoon, we are, again, unable to report. What is perfectly clear is that marriage has completed in our cousin the cure which the padre's energetic courtship so ably commenced. Far from studying Bengali, Mrs. Bennett flatly refuses to acquire even the customary rudiments of Hindustani. She has English-speaking servants. She eschews even the faintest shades of coloured society. How the padre had induced her to attend the Sens' party, I cannot imagine. He still regales each and all with descriptions of the helpful missionary existence he and his wife are to lead together in Milor Bagan, but our cousin's eye emits a frosty and a calculating gleam. I suspect her of other designs.

"We are still inclined to believe that our cousin was espoused by force. They were married quite privately, indeed secretly, by the Bishop, one morning before breakfast. Hal says the padre pounced upon Miss Brown as she

emerged for her morning constitutional, and propelled her forcibly up the hill into the Church. To my queries as to how he extracted the necessary responses, Hal replies that he didn't, he stepped on her corns, and administered neat pinches at appropriate periods, and so extracted faint squeals, which were interpreted by the dear old Bishop as the expected responses. Hal is mean enough to accuse the Bishop of being a confederate. You know he *is* rather short-sighted, and just a little hard of hearing.

“Well, once again, you wretch!

“Yours sincerely,

“MARGARET HAMMOND.”

CHAPTER XII.

It was early July. The Rains, which in June had broken in their customary niggardly fashion, in tantalizing spurts and stops, had now set in, in real earnest. For three nights and three days, it had poured without intermission, until the discomfort of the scorching days and breathless nights of June was forgotten in the depression of the sunless days and the heavy damp of the chilly nights. Walking, even for short distances, was practically impossible for wearers of skirts and shoes. As she drove slowly and cautiously through the dripping jungle, Beatrice found herself longing for the vanished sun. It was seven of the evening, the cloudy days were perceptibly shorter. The head-lights fell upon a scene of green, dripping ruin, as the car pushed its way through the water-bowed branches, which bent across and across the sodden road. The frail mud houses, dotted along the roadside, sank visibly under the beating rain, the sodden thatch dripping water within and without. How a single wall of sunbaked mud survived the merciless pelting of the rain, was one of the annual mysteries of patient Bengal. Here and there, the feeble glimmer of a primitive oil lamp, in one of the tiny verandahs, revealed a family

struggling with cooking operations over an unwilling fire of sodden, smoking sticks ; or the flickering flame would light a tiny interior, giving a depressing view of the occupants, huddling in such corners of the tiny apartment as afforded the fewest drippings from the sieve-like roof. Every tank was full to overflowing, the narrow tracks leading to the villages were shallow, muddy canals. Under foot, the jungle was an unbroken stretch of semi-fluid mud. Here and there, a poor little house had, in vernacular phraseology, "sat down," a disconsolate heap of soaked mud and sodden thatch. The village children shivered and sniffed, as they stood, ankle-deep in liquid mud, to watch the car go by, the rain beating on their bare, brown bodies, the mud, thrown up from the wheels of the car, splashing their naked limbs. Babus, with dhotis gingerly-hitched above their lean limbs, sprang aside from the road, and strove to protect their garments from the splashing wheels, by lowering their umbrellas from their heads to their knees. Such inhabitants of the jungle as were too poor to carry umbrellas, splashed along in the rain, clutching their sodden garments to their bony frames. A chorus of sniffs, throat-scrapings and coughs competed with the perpetual drip, drip of the water from the trees.

"There is much rain, brother."

"In the villages there is much water."

"Into my very house the rain comes."

"Aye ! with us, there is fever."

Patient Bengal! Not a grumble. Not a word of envy of the Memsahib, sitting warm and dry in the car, whose great wheels splashed yet further discomfort upon the shivering pedestrians. It was the time of rain; as for discomfort, damp, fever, these things belonged to the season. Sahibs rode and poor men walked, the rich sat dry in pakka houses, the poor dodged the drippings of leaky roofs; what was written was written.

In the bazaar, buying and selling went on busily, despite the beating rain. An unbroken black roof of cotton umbrellas, shining with wet, shifted and struggled in the dim, yellow lights of the row of tiny shops. At the hoot of the horn, a shudder of agitation quivered over the expanse of massed umbrellas, and they divided into two bobbing, staggering lines, as their owners sprang aside before the advancing car, squeaking, chattering, and striving, with their lowered umbrellas, to shelter their lean, bare legs from the splashing mud of the great wheels. And still the same patient, unquestioning good humour. Beyond the line of babus' houses, with their twinkling points of yellow light, in full view of the dim bazaar, blazed the brilliant illumination of the Bara Sabib's house, a little island of light and luxury in this sea of squalor. Beatrice looked on the surging crowd and asked herself, yet again, the question such a scene never failed to suggest. Why were these in the mud and she in the car? By what stroke of

fate, what turn of chance, was she not struggling on the road, haggling in one of the tiny shops, or, her eye turned across to the dim lights of the row of babus' houses, sitting in one of those dimly lighted, shuttered rooms, or struggling in a tiny outhouse with damp sticks and elaborate cookery. "Not more than others have we deserved," she murmured, "yet Thou hast given us more."

The car turned towards the gate, and the lights fell upon a little figure. It was Krishna. He was clad only in a dhoti, sodden with the rain, which beat upon his thin shoulders and uncovered head. The child was pitifully thin and frail, his little face showed drawn and pinched in the garish lights. He shivered, and hugged his narrow chest with his thin little arms, as he drew back to avoid the splashes from the wheels. The tears sprang to Beatrice's eyes as she marked the hollows round the big black eyes and the weary wisftfulness of the wasted little face.

Things were not well in Surendra's house. It was not the old trouble of social persecution. The disappearance of Romesh's upper room and staircase had been accepted in the bazaar as a righteous judgment upon the spying head of its portly occupant. There was a general impression that such swift retribution pointed to a protecting power behind Binodini. It was well to walk in the favour of Surendra and his house. Krishna went unmolested and was even petted. It was not good to quarrel with those

whose anger could bring two-storeyed houses to the level of thatched dwellings. Binodini was courted by the wives of the babus, she might have entertained visitors in her house every day, but Binodini did not encourage the advances of her neighbours. She was shy and quiet with the Memsahib. Had that lady been easily discouraged, she might have hesitated to continue her visits on the strength of the half-hearted invitations she received. But Beatrice, hoping and believing, persevered, conscious that, even yet, she lacked the clue to Binodini's trouble.

There was no longer any doubt that financial difficulties played a part in the mystery. One by one, the books had disappeared from the shelves. Piece by piece, Binodini's jewellery had followed them. The ear-rings went from the little ears, the pearls from the delicate nose. Gradually, the jingle of bangles was silenced upon the rounded arms, the ring of silver bells no longer betrayed each movement of the slender feet. Binodini offered no excuses, made no comment on the absence of her ornaments, she strove to hide her naked arms and ringless hands in the folds of her *sari*. Krishna's garments grew shabbier and scantier, his thin frame and little pinched face hinted of scanty meals. Binodini, too, looked thin and worn; she sat silent through the Memsahib's visits, neither urging nor dissuading her to repeat them.

On the very afternoon of this rainy night, Beatrice had sat with Binodini in the little room, so bare and barren without its books, so sadly silent without the music of Binodini's vanished ornaments. The Memsahib had ventured a shy question as to secret trouble, but had met with a courteous denial that anything was wrong. The rain had forbidden the excursions to the purdah garden, but Beatrice was uneasily aware that Binodini shunned and avoided her now friendly neighbours, nor was it at all surprising that she should do so, as to a Bengali woman the loss of her ornaments is social degradation. The Memsahib's inquiries as to the health of the various correspondents of her little friend evoked no information. Binodini no longer read their letters aloud, or sketched their biographies for the Memsahib's benefit. She seemed uneasy at the mention of their names, and gave evasive answers to Beatrice's queries. Beatrice felt like a traveller who reaches the apparent summit of a long hill, only to find himself confronted by another peak. She felt her friend slipping further from her grasp and, despite all Alice Lancaster's admonitions and her own stout resolution, she was sorely discouraged.

Thus burdened with thought, she was making her way, with lagging footsteps, up the stairs, when, at the turning point of the staircase, some one brushed past her, and, looking back, she saw Surendra in full flight down the stairs,

his raised hands pressed to his temples. It was plain that he had not seen her. He looked neither to right nor left, but hurried out into the rain.

"Whatever is the matter with Surendra Babu?" Beatrice asked of the Sahib, whom she found pacing the verandah.

"Ask me something easier," said the Sahib impatiently, without pausing in his restless march.

"What is it now? More leave?" asked Beatrice, slipping her arm through her husband's and joining in his walk.

"Worse," said the Sahib. "The fellow wants to resign altogether."

"No!" exclaimed Beatrice. "But what does he propose to do?"

"Oh! He gives the usual string of reasons. His father has sent for him, his mother is sick, he has to support his aged parents. What does it matter what he says?" said the Sahib wearily.

"I'm quite sure Surendra Babu is in some trouble," said Beatrice.

"I'm inclined to agree with you," said her husband. "But what can we do? We cannot force his confidence. Do you know anything?"

"Very little more than you," returned Beatrice. She described the gradually accumulating signs of poverty in Surendra's house.

The vanishing of Binodini's ornaments, the disappearance of the books, the wan looks of mother and child.

"Debt," suggested the Sahib.

"Somehow I can't think that," said Beatrice. "My own impression is that they are shielding or helping someone at home."

"And you can get nothing out of your little friend?"

"Nothing," said Beatrice.

"Well," said the Sahib, "I've given Surendra to understand that he must find and initiate a substitute before he goes, and that will take some time. I hope, for your sake, dear, that within that time we may find a better solution of the mystery than Surendra seems to have hit upon so far."

"For my sake!" repeated Beatrice. "Oh, dear! You won't emulate Mr. Hammond and blame me for this, will you?"

"Not a bit of it!" said the Sahib stoutly. "You had nothing to do with Surendra's appointment here."

But Beatrice's heart sank yet lower; she was conscious of an absurd feeling of responsibility for Surendra and his vagaries. Certainly, that wet night, it seemed that she had come to the end of her experiment, that the Great Adventure had ended in disaster and ignominy. She had loved, believed, persevered. There was no

further effort possible, nothing more to be done save —— to go on believing, hoping, persevering. That, Beatrice, with all her strength, strove to do, through the dark fortnight when the last and worst of Hammond's predictions seemed fulfilled, and Binodini, under cover of a multitude of courteous excuses, closed her door to the Memsahib. She was sick, her duties were many, her husband claimed her time, let the Memsahib, showing favour, forgive.

July was wearing to a close. There was a break in the Rains, welcome, with its cheery sunshine, despite the languid, steamy heat. Beatrice stood in the verandah, early one such sunny morning, watching the malis, who were engaged in the garden below, in a curious task. They were pulling, with scrupulous care, the heads of the blossoms from the various heavily scented, flowering bushes—only the heads, neither stalks nor leaves,—and gathering them into a flat, tray-like basket. Beatrice called Ram Lall, intending to order him to put a stop to this wanton waste of blossoms.

“They gather flowers for the poojah of the mother of Surendra Babu,” said Ram Lall, nodding approval at the work of destruction in the garden below.

“What !” exclaimed Beatrice.

“A week ago, they arrived,” said Ram Lall.

“Who arrived ?” asked Beatrice.

“The father and the mother of Surendra Babu and all the house, seven folk,” answered Ram Lall calmly : “has the Memsahib not heard ?”

“Does the Memsahib ever hear anything ?” asked Beatrice.

“Shall anything be concealed from the Memsahib ?” returned Ram Lall. “By reason of the rain, the Memsahib has not seen the work of the malis. Behold, it is known to all. The folk of Surendra Babu be come to dwell with him. Since the death of his two brothers, is he not become their sole support ?”

“Their sole support !” exclaimed Beatrice
 “It is known to all,” returned Ram Lall.
 “Thrice has Surendra Babu gone to his home, the Sahib giving leave. Has the Memsahib forgotten ?”

“I have not forgotten,” said Beatrice.

“Behold, by reason of the death of his brothers, did Surendra Babu make these journeys,” said Ram Lall.

“But what talk is this of sole support ?” said Beatrice.

“Hear me !” said Ram Lall. “As long as his brothers lived, so long did they give to eat to their father and provide money for the expenses of the house !”

“Surendra Babu had already given” began Beatrice.

“The Memsahib knows everything,” agreed Ram Lall. At the time of the death of his uncle, there came to Surendra Babu much money. These moneys he gave to his father and thenceforward went free. Yet, at the death of his brothers, their income was lost, and for his parents, in their old age, there was nought.”

“Then wherefore did Surendra seek to leave his appointment ?” asked Beatrice.

“Forasmuch as he had no longer rupees to dwell separately,” said Ram Lall. “Behold, where ten ate, there was but one to earn. Except they dwelt in one house, how should so many eat of the earnings of one ?”

“But Surendra would throw away and forsake his income ?” said Beatrice.

“The Memsahib speaks true words,” said Ram Lall. “Yet with these babus is there little understanding. Surendra Babu was a man of new ideas. He would dwell with his wife and son, apart from his family home, even as dwell the sahibs. As long as his brothers remained alive to give to eat to his parents, so long was it possible, this separate dwelling of Surendra. But when his brothers dying, his father and his mother, together with the widows of his brothers, as also their children, when all these became the responsibility of Surendra, verily, then, how should he any longer dwell apart ?”

"If he forsook his appointment and his income, how should he and his people dwell anywhere?" asked Beatrice impatiently.

"The Memsahib's words are words of wisdom," said Ram Lall, unconvinced.

"Further," he added, "there will be no more talk of forsaking appointments or the loss of incomes. Has not the father of Surendra with all his house come to dwell with him?"

The Sahib, coming into the verandah, at this juncture, confirmed Ram Lall's statement. Surendra had just applied to be allowed to withdraw his resignation. He had said nothing to the Sahib of the reason for his change of plans, and Beatrice hesitated as to whether she should take upon herself the responsibility of enlightening him. Deciding that the news would come better from herself, plain and unadorned, than with the embellishments of bazaar rumour and the insinuations of Surendra's enemies, she told her husband of the arrival of the family.

The Sahib whistled. "Ten people in those quarters!" he exclaimed. "Can't possibly be allowed."

"You are not supposed to know it," suggested Beatrice.

"I don't know it officially," said the Sahib, his face taking on an expression of relief. "Well, for the present, I won't know it, but it's absurd, isn't it?"

"It's an absurd country," said Beatrice absently. In her heart, she knew that the arrival of this family was, for her, a dream come true. She had longed to meet the old mother, that woman of much belief, that autocratic person of unquestioned authority, the undisputed ruler of daughters-in-law, the rearer of many grandchildren. She had longed to talk with the old student, that sturdy sceptic of other years, now engrossed in the practice of tardy pieties, absorbed in the fabrication of endless precautions for his erstwhile venturesome soul. And the widows, those pathetic figures in pious households.

Yet, what of Binodini? Here was an end of the peaceful household, the leisurely round of simple duties? Ten persons crowded into the tiny house, ten persons to cook for, old folk to wait upon and tend. Beatrice's heart misgave her for Binodini. And would she meet the family? Would the closed doors open for her again? Beatrice thought they would, and she was right; that very afternoon came Ram Lall bearing a note in a new hand. The letter was from the mother of Surendra. In spidery hieroglyphics, with endless flourishes, in flowery phrases and erratic spelling, she begged the favour of a visit. When would the Memsahib bring to her poor dwelling the dust of her honoured feet, when should the eyes of her servant be gladdened with the sight of the Memsahib's face? Behold, for the sake of looking upon the face of the Memsahib, for this

reason only, had her servant encompassed so long and so perilous a journey. Was the Mem-sahib not the father and the mother of herself and her family? Was she not their Rani, the dispenser of good and evil?

With many an anxious reference to the dictionary, many an experimental transcription of hard to soft consonants, Beatrice puzzled out the crabbed conundrum, and extracted the information that her presence was earnestly desired in Surendra's house that afternoon. She lost no time in concocting and despatching as flowery a reply to the invitation as her limited Bengali and more conscientious spelling permitted. That afternoon saw her again before Surendra's door.

She was greeted by Binodini and led into the inner room, the scene of so many talks before these days of anxiety and mystery. Upon the big taktaposh, surrounded by pillows, sat, in simple state, the old father. His voluble greeting was wholly unintelligible to the Mem-sahib, who replied in her hesitating, halting Bengali and looked nervously at Binodini.

"Seeing the Mem-sahib, he obtains the desire of his heart," interpreted Binodini. "He has no words to describe his joy."

Beatrice stammered out a courteous reply, and wondered what manner of verbal bombardment would descend upon her uncomprehending ears, had the old man "the words" he professed to lack.

A tiny, white-robed figure entered the room.

"It is the mother of of our doctor babu," murmured Binodini.

Beatrice opened her eyes. She had expected an imposing person of portly presence and commanding manner. Instead, she saw a tiny figure, daintily slim, with the smallest and slenderest of hands and feet. As she stood in the frame of the doorway, her bowed face shadowed by the drooping sari, she might have been Binodini's sister. As she came forward into the room, the light from the low window showed the fine lines about the bright eyes, and betrayed the fallen contours of face and mouth. Even so, Surendra's mother did not look an old woman. Through the thin veil of the sari, the sleek hair shone dark as Binodini's own, she held herself straight and walked with supple ease. She bent low before Beatrice and established herself, standing, at the foot of the taktaposh.

"Will you not sit, mother?" asked Beatrice, embarrassed before the two silent, standing women. The old lady's dark eyes lit up with an amused smile; she shook her head and remained standing.

"And you, little mother?" said the Mem-sahib, turning to Binodini. "Are you not tired? Will you not sit?"

The old father laid his hand on Binodini's shoulder, and drew her to a sitting position on

the bed. "She has many duties," he said approvingly. "She does everything for me; that is our custom," he added for Beatrice's benefit. "A daughter-in-law belongs to her father-in-law, she belongs no more to her father's house."

"And her husband?" asked Beatrice.

"Oh, her husband!" the old man dismissed the question of the rights of such a relatively unimportant person with a contemptuous jerk of his head.

"It is even as he says," said Binodini. "It is our custom."

Beatrice thought of the much-discussed love of Surendra for independent dwelling. Her heart misgave her as she looked at Binodini's tired face.

There was a patter of softly falling feet, and Beatrice turned her head, to find two other women had joined the company.

"My daughters-in-law," said the old mother. "These be widows," she whispered. She closed her lips and nodded mysteriously.

Beatrice saw two women, robed in white borderless saris. They wore no ornaments, and the vermilion marriage mark was absent from their foreheads. The pale face, bright eyes, and fine features of the younger of the pair seemed familiar to Beatrice. A smile lit the delicate face, and Beatrice recognized the lady of the wheaten skin. She was no longer

gorgeously apparelled, she was decorously dumb, otherwise, both women looked dully prosperous. Their heads were not shorn, the outline of the customary knot of bound hair showed beneath the shrouding sari. There was nothing of the traditional tragedy of Hindu widowhood about them. A group of four children clung about the women. In the background stood a tall boy of some fourteen or fifteen years. Beatrice did not need to be told that he was Surendra's brother. His relationship was written plainly on his face. They stood crowded about the narrow door way. It was as Ram Lall had said, the household burden of Surendra was increased by seven persons.

Beatrice went through the prescribed inquiries for the health of each separate person and was rewarded with the customary catalogue of symptoms and ailments. The old father had a cough. The old mother had fever, the children had colds, as was apparent to the most indifferent ear.

"By good fortune you are come to the house of a doctor," was the Memsahib's comment. "Your son has skill," she added.

There was a general smile in the direction of the old father, who greeted the mention of Surendra's skill with a sceptical grunt.

"He has no faith," said the old lady proudly.

"He eats not medicines from the hand of his son," said the lady of the wheaten skin, speaking for the first time.

“ My mother-in-law, she also eats not,” said the other widow.

“ They have no faith,” chimed in the fair lady.

“ My Sahib has great faith in Surendra Babu, your son,” said the Memsahib. The two dark faces lit up at her words, but their hands signalled deprecation of such outspoken praise.

“ His intentions are good,” murmured the old father with simulated indifference.

“ You are my Rani,” broke out the old mother, “ the source of my life. To look upon your face, for this alone, have I come this so great journey.”

“ Nay, mother, to see your son are you come,” said Beatrice.

“ She speaks truth,” said the old father. “ To see the Memsahib is she come. Yet the Memsahib speaks truth also, for this my son is the sole support of my old age. When he came not at my call, even then, leaving our home, we journeyed hither.”

“ Oh ! you sent for him ? ” asked Beatrice.

“ How should we not send ? ” returned the old man. “ Behold, my sons, the husbands of of these,” indicating, with a skinny finger, the two widows, “ those being dead, to whom else should we turn ? ”

“ And he came not ? ” asked Beatrice.

“ Thrice did he come and thrice he went again,” said the old man. “ In these days do the young forget duty, and show no reverence for their parents.”

“ Yet having made his agreement with the Sahib, how should he stay ? ” asked Beatrice.

“ Having become my sole support, how should he not stay ? ” repeated the old man. “ Is not the first duty of a son to his parents ? ”

“ Further, has a wife no duty to her mother-in-law ? ” chimed in the little old lady.

“ But abandoning his appointment, whence should your son derive an income for your support ? ” asked Western common sense.

“ Except all dwell in one house, how should he be able to support us ? ” returned Eastern tradition.

“ So you came here ? ” asked Beatrice.

“ Nay, to look upon the face of the Memsahib are we come,” was the unhesitating reply.

“ The responsibilities of your son are become heavy,” said Beatrice, looking at the weary face of Binodini, and pressing the little Krishna, who had crept quietly into the room, to her side.

“ Save this youth,” nodding towards the standing boy, “ is he not my only son ? Shall a son forget his duty to his parents ? ” returned the old man.

“ Shall the decrees of Brahma be evaded or shall that which is written be blotted out ? ” said the old mother.

“ How many were your sons ? ” asked Beatrice.

“ In the beginning,” said the old man, “ my sons were five.”

“ Then three are dead,” said Beatrice.

“ Two only are dead,” corrected the old man.

“ Yet there remain only Surendra Babu and this youth,” said Beatrice.

“ Hear me,” said the old man. “ There was yet another son, he also studied medicine.”

“ He left home and went to the city,” whispered one of the widows.

“ To Bombay,” said the old mother.

“ And cannot he also give to your support ? ” asked Beatrice.

“ Who knows ? ” returned the old man indifferently. “ Since many years he writes not. As for Surendra, he is even in this place. He is my sole support.”

The bland indifference to the burden of Surendra was too much for Western patience. Beatrice rose amid general expostulations and entreaties to remain.

“ You are my Rani,” began the old lady again.

“Nay, mother,” said Beatrice, “not as a Rani, but as a friend would I be in your eyes.”

“As one of my own daughters will I make prayers for your Honour,” cried the old lady warmly. Shall it be so?”

“As my own mother will I also remember you before God,” returned Beatrice.

“Receive my benediction,” said the old lady. “As the hairs of my head, so be your years.”

Amid a chorus of flowery speeches the Memsahib took her leave.

“Heard you ever aught of this brother of Surendra Babu?” asked the Memsahib, of Ram Lall as he walked the prescribed paces behind her through the compound.

“Speaks the Memsahib of him who dwells in Bombay?” asked Ram Lall.

“Oh! You do know!” said Beatrice.

“Is it not known to all?” returned Ram Lall.

“It would be to the profit of Surendra Babu,” suggested Beatrice, “to find that brother.”

“The Memsahib’s words are wise,” returned Ram Lall. “Of a surety it would be to the profit of Surendra.”

“Unless he should prove to be a poor man,” said Beatrice.

“He is not a poor man,” said Ram Lall with conviction.

“How so ? ” said Beatrice.

“Had he been a poor man, he would ere this, seeking help, have come home.”

“We must find this rich man of Bombay,” thought the Memsahib as she climbed the stairs.

CHAPTER XIII.

ROMESH sat upon the front bench on the bows of a ferry steamer, occupying, on the strength of a single ticket, fully three times the space usually allotted to a first class passenger. Romesh was taking a holiday. He had chosen well; a pleasanter mode of spending one of the close, heavy days of late October, that breathless spell of steamy heat between the end of the Rains and the beginning of the Cold Weather, could not well be imagined. The river was swollen to a mighty brown flood. A powerful tide rolled up from the sea, thrashing the bows of the steamer, which, with throbbing engines and churning propellers, beat forward against it. The wind blew gratefully cool off the water, rippling it to waves, which surged to billows, in the wake of the passing and crossing steamers. The slanting rays of the morning sun kissed each ripple to gold. The river was waking from the sighs and frowns of the Rains to the life and laughter of the clear skies of the Cold Weather. Up and down the broad, brown water-way, business and bustle. Fussy launches shrieked warnings to each other, as they tore to and fro from jetty to jetty, or scuttled out of the path of the great sea-going steamers. Ferry

steamers panted against the strong tide towards the sea, or flew with the swift current to the city. But Romesh saw none of these things.

Romesh was doing himself well. It was not often that he asked for leave, and, then, rarely for purposes of mere pleasure. To-day, he had arranged an expedition after his own heart, a judicious admixture of business and pleasure, a delicious programme of spying, prying and mischief-making: his motive, envy, hatred and malice; his object, revenge. The affairs of Surendra had been followed with no less interest by Romesh than by the Memsahib. He owed Surendra an ill turn for the loss of his upper room. Even robbed of his watch-tower, and compelled to refrain from active persecution, he was still acquainted with every detail of the working of the little household opposite his own establishment. He had watched the recent developments with a lively curiosity. He knew, to a peppercorn, the provisions which were consumed day by day in the household of Surendra—to a sprinkling of spice, to a turn of the spoon, how they were cooked. He was aware of the disappearance of Binodini's ornaments, he knew of the empty bookshelves. He, no less than the Memsahib, marked how Krishna grew thin and went ill clad. He was agreeably certain that some discreditable explanation attached to these various phenomena.

He noted Surendra's absences from home. He had no doubt but that these expeditions

had, for their object, some dark enterprise, the disclosure of which would be to Surendra's hurt, and to the advantage of Romesh. But spy as he would, he could not discover the exact situation of Surendra's patriarchal home, much less the nature of the business which so frequently called him thither. He knew Surendra hailed from a village called Krishnagore, but there were many Krishnagores. It was useless to pump Krishna, for Surendra, wise as Romesh was wily, had been careful that Krishna possessed no more information than was common knowledge. Eavesdropping was fruitless, for Binodini was forewarned; dangerous, since Ram Lall exceeded Romesh himself in detective aptitude.

Thus hampered, it had cost Ramesh some months of anxious activity to discover Surendra's route, mode of travel, and exact destination. The first had entailed endless casual questioning of jungle villagers, milk-sellers, gharri-wallahs, and other such humble frequenters of the jungle roads as were unlikely to spread abroad the fact and the manner of his investigations. Surendra's first journey had taken place in mid-May, and it was now the last week of October. For four long months had Romesh pried and pumped and pieced together his scraps of ill-gotten information. It had taken him a full two months to track Surendra the five miles along the river-side road, to the out-of-the-way ferry station

from which he had taken the steamer. Only by trudging ahead the whole weary five miles, and waiting patiently at the ticket office, disguised by many an oppressive garment, had Romesh succeeded in hearing the name of the ferry station for which Surendra was bound. Even then, he could not be sure that this ferry station was Surendra's final destination. Seven short trips on seven Sunday mornings, upon the ferry steamer, had failed to elicit information upon this point. Even the gall-fortified perseverance of Romesh was likely to flag, when, on his eighth expedition, he fell in with a khalassi who recognized Romesh's description of Surendra, and remembered the latter's three journeys.

But the khalassi was unable to say whether the ferry station at which he had left the boat had been Surendra's ultimate destination or not. The khalassi had questioned sundry habitués of the route. One claimed to have noticed Surendra, several had marked Romesh's fondness for Sunday morning trips, one suddenly recollected having seen him prowling in semi-disguise about the ticket office. Romesh judged it wise to abandon further inquiry, and act upon such information as he already possessed.

It was the general conclusion of the worthies who had taken part in these consultations that Surendra's journey had not been completed at the ferry station, but that he had gone inland. Opinion agreed upon the road he had taken.

Hence it was Romesh's intention, unless fresh information offered en route, to pursue his investigations in the villages along this particular road, limiting the extent of his journey in accordance with the hour at which he must rejoin the returning ferry boat, the boat by which Surendra himself had returned on the occasion of his one day's excursion. Thus covering the same ground in the same time as Surendra himself, Romesh judged that, unless he had been wholly misinformed, he couldn't fail to arrive upon the scene of Surendra's secret. Nevertheless, he wished he possessed that one, last link in the chain, the exact geographical situation of Surendra's native village. Fate played into the persevering fingers of Romesh. He had not been long upon the boat before he heard the name of the village he proposed to make the scene of his investigations. A young babu, apparently a stranger to all on the boat, was inquiring as to the distance of the place in question. Romesh, ever in quest of fresh knowledge, looked at him curiously. He had already been on the boat when Romesh had embarked.

"When I dwelt in these parts," the young babu was saying, "there was not thus, this coming and going of boats upon the river. Concerning these boats, I have knowledge neither of distance nor of time."

Romesh eagerly proffered his help and entered into conversation with the stranger.

No detective of romance could have wished for a more propitious coincidence. The stranger was going to Gharampur. He was going further, his destination lay inland. Yes, he proposed to walk, he was bound for the village of Krishnagore. What ! Romesh was also going to Krishnagore ! What excellent fortune ! Verily their foreheads were favourable to-day. They would go in company. Beyond this point, even Romesh hesitated to prompt fate. He yearned to know the nature of the stranger's business in Krishnagore. Something told him that it was concerned with Surendra's affairs, that the interest of this young stranger in Krishnagore portended disaster for Surendra, but he hesitated to mention Surendra's name. Not once did it occur to Romesh that the stranger's craving for information had followed close upon the examination of tickets and the disclosure of Romesh's own destination.

Arrived at Gharampur, they set out together for Krishnagore, but on the outskirts of the village, the stranger, courteously but firmly, shook off Romesh, leaving that gentleman to continue his investigations alone. Left to himself, Romesh proceeded to inquire of the parawala, the chaukidar and persons of similar facilities for acquiring information, for the house of one Rai Babu, more he didn't know. More, there was no need to know. Bhupendra Nath Rai had left the village. For full three months he had been gone, he and all his house.

Could Romesh see the house ?

Why not ? It stood empty. Save its owner, who would wish to dwell therein ? Was it not fallen to ruin, with age and neglect ?

Did the chaukidar know the reason of their departure ?

Ah ! so had many questioned. The words of a wise man were few. For the dumb were no enemies.

Yet silence was not always to the profit of one's friends.

Ah, ha ! A friend ! Well, what would Romesh know ?

Was it by reason of debt or for some difficulty that Bhupendra Nath Rai had thus forsaken his home ? Was there by any chance, Romesh lowered his voice, rounded his eyes, spread right and left his podgy fingers ; was there, by any chance, a son concerned in the matter ?

The chaukidar looked wise. Romesh had said it. There was a son concerned.

Twice had he, coming from none knew where, appeared in the village. Then the family had vanished.

Was it to join this son that they went ?

The chaukidar spat discreetly. Who knew ? Thus, pumping and evading, the well-matched pair arrived at the deserted house of Bhupendra Nath Rai. It was indeed a depressing spectacle.

A fitting scene, in the eyes of Romesh, for doubtful deeds and questionable secrets. It was a two-storeyed building of brick. On one side of the house, a high brick wall ran parallel to the road. The bars of the windows were broken and awry. The shutters hung dejectedly from their hinges. The door had fallen in, the crumbling gateway lay blocking the entrance. Within, ruin and decay. At the far side of the courtyard stood the tumble-down buildings of the inner apartments. The gaping central doorway of this inner building afforded a vision of a second brick-strewn, dilapidated courtyard. To the left, a green-crusted tank, with broken steps and the remains of a tiny bathing-ghât. Over all, a crumbling desolation. So suggestive of insecurity was the trembling dilapidation of the deserted homestead that Romesh hesitated to venture his portly person within the gate. His round, black eyes surveyed the scene with a gloating satisfaction. He saw before him, yet further evidence of the disreputable nature of Surendra's family affairs.

Curiosity conquered caution. Romesh stepped gingerly over the fallen door, and entered the rubbish-strewn courtyard. Treading delicately, he picked his way between the fallen bricks to the doorway in the opposite building. Here, the courtyard was in even greater disrepair. Stumbling over the mounds of broken bricks, he made his way to the verandah, and peered in at the low doorway. Within, were the mouldering remains of simple furnishings. A taktaposh, the wooden

platform which serves for sitting accommodation through the day, and forms a sleeping place at night, the inevitable single chair, a broken almirah, upon a rickety, ant-eaten table, a few dilapidated books. In the far corner of the dim room crouched the figure of a man, his head bowed upon his knees. Romesh, peeping and prying, felt his investigations incomplete without a sight of the bowed face. He coughed, scraped, spat, and coughed again. The man started, and lifted his face from his knees. It was the young babu of the boat.

Romesh's conjectures were confirmed. He had no longer any doubt as to the nature of his fellow-traveller's business and the object of his journey. Without a doubt, he was a detective, engaged professionally upon the self-same investigations as Romesh was pursuing from sheer pleasure in a congenial task. Romesh would bestow upon the detective the benefits of his own knowledge and experience. Thus advising and assisting, he would, *sans* risk, *sans* further exertion, accomplish his malicious ends. No need now to ponder and puzzle as to the most effective means of applying his discoveries when he should have made them. All he had to do was to facilitate the investigations of the emissary of the law by the divulging, or even the fabrication of incriminating facts, the dropping of hints, the confirming of suspicions, the suggesting of every fresh snare for the culprit's feet which malice could devise, and to lead the

detective, thus fortified with facts and proofs, to Surendra's door.

"Tut ! Tut !" he observed as with outspread hands and wagging head, he minced delicately into the room. "Verily a scene of ruin and decay. This, Sir, it would appear, is the house of an exceedingly neglectful person."

The detective drew himself slowly to his feet.

"It speaks of poverty and sorrow," he muttered, half to himself.

"Or of debt and doubtful dealings," suggested Romesh.

"Shall poverty be called sin ?" asked the detective.

"Yet except there be a breeze, the trees wave not," said Romesh, wagging his head wisely.

"Yet even good men come to poverty," said the detective.

"How shall the father of virtuous sons have need ?" asked Romesh. "Behold, a poverty such as this," he waved accusing hands round the dilapidated room, "a poverty such as this has its roots in debt, its origin in dishonour."

"Why this talk of debt and dishonour ?" asked the detective ; "know you aught of the history of this house ?"

"What would your Honour inquire concerning the history of this house ?" asked Romesh evasively.

The detective paused, cast a keen glance at Romesh, after the approved methods of the detectives of Romesh's malicious imaginings. "Know you aught of them who dwelt in this place?" he asked.

"Speaks a wise man all he knows?" asked Romesh.

"There be times for speech and times for silence," returned the detective.

"And for the dumb no enemies," said Romesh.

"There is also tribulation for them who withhold the truth," said the detective, looking significantly into the round, black eyes of Romesh.

Romesh spread conciliatory fingers. Verily, his conjectures were confirmed. Here was a veritable detective, a Daniel come to judgement!

"What would your Honour know?" he inquired in his most ingratiating tones.

"Tell me the name of the man who dwelt here," said the detective.

"Your Honour would know the name of him who has fled from this place?" asked Romesh.

"Who speaks of flight?" said the detective. "Yet, since you have said the words, who is it that has thus abandoned his home and fled?"

"The name of this person," said Romesh, stepping close to his companion, and lowering his voice to the squeaky whisper of secret

revelations, "the name of this person is Bhupendra Nath Rai."

"Bhupendra Nath Rai," repeated the detective. "And wherefore, thus giving his house to ruin, has he fled? Whither has he gone?"

"Touching the reason of the ruin or of his flight," said Romesh, "who shall say?"

"Whither has he gone?" repeated the detective.

"Touching the place of his going," said Romesh, warily, "who are you and wherefore make you inquiries concerning the affairs of Bhupendra Nath Rai?"

"Who I am, concerning that think no more," returned the detective. "As to why I inquire, there are reasons."

"What would your Honour know?" asked Romesh.

"Tell me, concerning the family of this Bhupendra Nath Rai, had he sons?"

Ah, ha! Now they were coming to the point. As Romesh had suspected, it was Surendra who was the object of the detective's inquiries. Romesh had his enemy in his hands. He had but to hand him over to justice. "Bhupendra Nath Rai had two sons," he replied.

"Did they accompany their father in his flight?"

"One fled in the company of his father," said Romesh.

“ And the other, did he remain here ? ”

“ As for the other, he neither fled with his father nor did he remain in this place,” equivocated Romesh, balefully happy in the congenial task of insinuation and innuendo.

“ Whither went he ? ” pursued the detective.

“ Who shall say, when he dwelt not here ? ” replied Romesh.

“ Oh ! He dwelt not here ? Then where had he his dwelling ? ”

“ What is your business with Surendra ? ” asked Romesh, with well simulated suspicion.

“ Oh ! He is called Surendra ! ” cried the detective. “ Touching my business, have no fear. Not to the hurt of Surendra is my business.”

Romesh smiled, he knew otherwise. Professing a warm friendship for Surendra, and exacting many an assurance of his hearer’s good will towards his supposed friend, he proceeded to give a version of the history of the doctor-babu’s household, during the past few months, which would have amazed even the scandal-loving bazaar. With venomous skill, he wove truth and subtle insinuation into an incriminating web of evidence about the absent Surendra.

Surendra had come a stranger to the house in the jungle, none knew whence or wherefore. He had lived, none could say how. He had

called himself a doctor but few sought his skill. He had no patients, no people, no friends. None consorted with him. He had many letters, he went often from home. Concerning his wife, Romesh shook his head, conveying by shrugs of fleshy shoulders and much manual gesticulation the things he would have his hearer to understand. Up to the coming of Surendra, the health of the district had been excellent. Since his arrival there had been epidemics of cholera, both in the villages and within the precincts of the factory which enjoyed the benefit of the labours of Romesh. What would you? A doctor must have patients. Except one slice heads how learn to use arms? Is it not written, 'By the slaying of hundreds, a doctor; of thousands, a physician'?

On the strength of one of these epidemics, Surendra had made his way into the factory, and into the favour of the Sahib. Nay, the doctor babu of the factory, the appointed physician of long standing, he also had fallen a victim to the cholera, and his post and his income had the wily Surendra secured for himself.

Even at this point, the ambition of Surendra remained unsatisfied. It was not enough that he had secured the favour of the Bara Sahib, he and his wife must thrust themselves upon the notice of the Memsahib also. By one pretext and another, had this man of

guile kept himself and his family continually before the eyes of the Sahib. On the pretence of teaching her Bengali, with which language she was already acquainted, this Surendra spent, daily, hours alone with the Memsahib. At this point he eyed his hearer speculatively, but that which he saw in the detective's eye decided Romesh to leave him to construct his own imaginings in this direction. Satisfied with his own success, he must needs connive at an acquaintance between the Memsahib and his wife, with the result that he had, in that respect, fallen into his own trap, for his wife had become a gadder from home, a walker of the bazaars.

Here, a sharp exclamation from the detective caused Romesh to pause in his tirade and to look towards his hearer. But the detective only lowered his eyes and motioned Romesh to proceed. Romesh, nothing loath, continued.

The wife of Surendra had, as Romesh had said, taken to idle ways. "She walked abroad, and sat in the outer rooms and generally neglected her house. Surendra and the child ate stale rice"

"Oh! There was a child!"

There was a child. Could it be credited! Even this child was not spared a share in the plots and machinations of his father! The day long, he stood at the gate of the Bara Sahib, taught to run after the Memsahib with tales and with requests. Verily, this cunning family

had worked the hurt of Surendra's fellow-babus. No man in the place had been safe from his lying insinuations. Had not he, Romesh, suffered the indignity of the removal of his upper room, the partial destruction of his house, at the suggestion of this Surendra. Did not his children fear to go abroad, by reason of the persecutions and the derision of Krishna ?

How did all this concern Bhupendra Nath Rai ? What profit in haste ? Let the babu have patience and he should know all.

This Surendra had the favour of the Bara Sahib and feared nothing ; according to his own will, he worked or was idle. When it pleased him, he took leave and went away, until, at last, even the patience of the Sahib was at an end. That Surendra was upon doubtful business, of that there could be no doubt. He was in debt, the interest of his debt was heavy. He had secret dealings, he feared lest the matters of his debts and his dealings be made plain to the Sahib.

What proof ? Proof in plenty. Touching the matter of debt, had he not sold his books ? Were not the ornaments of his wife in pawn ? Did not the child go hungry ? Was he not seen in the bazaar, naked as the son of a cooli ? In these things, what proof of debt ?

Except there be extortion, how shall a man take from the arms of his wife her bangles ? Save for pressure for payment, how strip from her head and her face her jewels ?

“ Even so, why this talk of doubtful dealings ? ”

Romesh's eyes grew rounder, his shoulders shrugged, his hands waved, his voice alternately whispered and squeaked, in his efforts to convey a clear understanding of Surendra's conduct. Came a man ever to such a pass, save by dishonest means ? Had an honest man thus hasty recourse to pawning and selling ? Were there not for a righteous man means ? Were there not lendings and repayings ? Had not even Bara Sahibs been known to make loans to trusted servants ? Nay, such straits as beset this Surendra had their roots in evil dealings. Let the babu hear !

What of Bhupendra Nath Rai ? Had not Bhupendra Nath Rai fled from this place and taken refuge with Surendra ? Was he not, even now, in hiding in Surendra's quarters, he and his whole house ? Were such bandobasts not forbidden in the factory ? Did not this bad man, Surendra, go in terror lest his dealings should be discovered by the Sahib, and his iniquities rewarded. Would the babu see for himself ? Let him accompany Romesh and with his own eyes he should see these things. Aye, it was full time they should take the road to the steamer. Let them go in company, and the babu should see.

The sky was aglow with sunset as they left the house. From the village came the distant tinkle of temple bells, the clang of cymbals, the

mournful wail of conch shells. From far and near came the echo of the Muazzin. Romesh, as deaf to the calls to prayer as he was blind to the beauty of the sunset, led his acquaintance to the steamer, losing no opportunity by the road of letting fall further hints and insinuations against Surendra. Night fell before they arrived at the jetty, a dim island of light in an ocean of darkness. Far down the river, the searchlights of the coming steamer streamed out upon the inky water in a broad, silver ribbon, which swept right and left before the advancing boat, revealing, in a rapid succession of vivid pictures, the secrets of the river bank. Across the water, a brown, thatched village rose suddenly out of the darkness before the searching finger of light. The village faded back into the night, and further down the bank there flashed out a group of white-robed figures which carried, in slow procession, a shrouded charpoy along a tree-lined road.

The light left the bank and swept the veil of night from the dark face of the river. The bustle and business of morning had given place to silence and peace. The screaming launches were gone. Only the slowly moving country boats, with their cumbersome loads of straw or piles of red earthenware pots, drifted swiftly with the tide or were rowed laboriously against it. The smoke of the cooking-fires rose from the boats, in black streaks, upon the silver ribbon of the searchlight. Tiny, black figures

bent over cooking-pots, or, stooping, pored over the pages or sacred books, by the light of a smoking oil-lamp, swinging and chanting as they read. But Romesh had eyes for none of these things. He blinked, as the finger of light touched his round eyes and working lips. He stumbled, and narrowly escaped a fall, as he stepped on to the steamer, still waving an emphasis of his insinuations. The searchlights swept ahead, the engines throbbed, the steamer turned aside to jetties, stopped, and puffed off again, but still Romesh whispered and waved.

Never, in all his scandal-mongering experience, had Romesh enjoyed the interest of such an appreciative listener. The nature of the young babu's profession was plain, even to a less acute observer than the gratified Romesh. Not a single detail of Romesh's revelations was passed over without minute questioning and re-questioning. Trifles, which Romesh himself had forgotten or deemed of no account, were brought to his mind by the ingenious catechizing of his detective friend. The dates of Surendra's journeys, the intervals between them. The dates from which signs of poverty had appeared in his house. The exact number of the persons who had arrived from Krishnagore. The date of their arrival. The amount of Surendra's salary. Romesh was kept fully occupied, in the congenial occupation of divulging every detail of Surendra's private affairs, up to the arrival of the steamer at the jetty.

The long, hot walk through the jungle, airless and stifling by contrast with the cool breezes on the moving steamer, was passed in equally agreeable revelations and enlargements thereof. The refusal of the stranger to accompany Romesh further than within sight of the lights of the bazaar, only made certainty doubly sure as to the motives of his friend's investigations in the mind of that worthy. Declining Romesh's offer to conduct him to Surendra's door, the babu turned aside into the jungle, and Romesh continued his way to the factory, well satisfied with his day's work. He found the precincts of the factory a bustle of moving lights and shouting figures. Oh that his detective friend had seen good to accompany him to Surendra's presence ! There was yet another link in the chain of evidence against Surendra. Yet again had cholera broken out, to the terror of the factory and the opportunity of Surendra.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE cholera had descended upon the factory in the usual fashion. A gang of coolies had arrived from up-country, applied for work, and been duly accepted and installed in the cooli lines. There was nothing to tell of the infected water and polluted milk they had drunk on the journey, nothing to hint at the deadly peril they were bringing to the factory, yet at dawn, on the following morning, the day of Romesh's expedition, terror reigned in the cooli lines.

The epidemic came at an unlucky moment for Surendra. The months of mental strain, financial stress, and poor food had told on him, physically and mentally. Since the arrival of his family, the general unrest of the crowded house had added considerably to his discomfort. The colds, coughs, fevers, and other minor ailments, generally accepted in a Bengali household as no less a part of the rainy season than clouds and damp, had run through the family in irritating succession.

The old father was discovered to be in an advanced stage of phthisis, and demanded constant attention. In that tiny house of thin walls and crowded humanity, there seemed no corner but echoed with the old man's hollow cough.

Surendra, unable to sleep, took upon himself the entire burden of night nursing. He was miserably conscious of a deterioration in his work, of a clouded brain and listless will. He was guiltily aware of ill-judged decisions, and neglected or slovenly accomplished duties. His modern knowledge convicted him of culpable folly in exposing Krishna, his wife, and himself to the dangers of infection from his father's dread disease. Filial piety and the chains of tradition, the latter more especially as embodied in the tongues of the feminine majority of his household, forbade the closing of his father's room to Krishna, or suggesting precautions, in the course of her nursing duties, to Binodini.

Surendra looked wistfully back on the quiet life in the house in the jungle, those blissful years when he had walked independently, dwelt separately, a man of new ideas. He had not a doubt as to the mode of life to his taste. The undisputed rule of his quiet house, the undivided devotion of his wife, the unhampered training of his little son,—who could fail to prefer such a life to this babel of women's tongues, this chattering and quarrelling, this confusion of the joys and sorrows of three generations?

Yet, had a man a right to seek his own pleasure, apart from those of his own flesh and blood, preferring his wife to the mother who had borne him, setting the welfare of his child before the care of his parents? Had he, indeed, a right to claim his wife as his

own, to deprive his mother of the service and the devotion of her daughter-in-law? Was it a judgement upon self-seeking and filial neglect, this sudden burden of poverty and care?

Common sense shouted aloud against the injustice of this dragging burden of helpless souls upon his young life, yet tradition murmured and threatened, and all Surendra's ponderings and puzzlings failed to point a road to freedom. He took no blame to himself that he had not known of the decline of the family fortunes in the life-time of his brothers. They were his elders; moreover, he had, at the price of his uncle's legacy, bought his freedom. Making no monthly contribution to the family expenses, he had no right to inquire or to interfere. He had intended undertaking the education of his youngest brother, when the time should come for him, in his turn, to follow the family tradition and study medicine. In the meantime, he knew that his brothers had taken appointments in the city, which admitted of week-end visits to the patriarchal home.

He was aware that the old house was falling into disrepair, but he had not realized that the adjoining fields had gradually been sold away from the family, that the very homestead was mortgaged. These revelations had come upon him with the death of his eldest brother. From that time, every pice of his savings, every coin he could pinch from his income, or raise by sales and pledges, had gone to redeem his

family from the bondage of debt. With the death of his second brother, the entire burden of the family passed to his shoulders. In his despair, he had seen no other course than to resign his appointment and seek some employment which should admit of his visiting and supervising the patriarchal home, Binodini and Krishna forming a part of the joint household and he, living as best he could, in the place of his employment.

The sudden descent of his family upon his tiny house had put an end to these plans. Surendra was keenly aware of the injustice to himself and his employer of the arrangement. Yet day by day he delayed to confess his position to the Sahib, or to make a practical attempt to tackle the difficulty. He had, indeed, ventured to suggest that the family should take up its abode in the house in the jungle, Binodini, with Krishna, accompanying her mother-in-law as in duty bound; but the proposal had raised such a shrill tempest of protest that he didn't dare to press it further.

Hence the big house stood empty, and Surendra's tiny official quarters swarmed with crowded, coughing humanity. A word with the Sahib, and his perfectly reasonable proposal would have been enforced by official authority, but the traditions of many Hindu generations stirred in his brain, and breathed curses and disasters upon the unfilial wretch who would drive his sick father from his doors, denying the

shelter of his roof to his aged mother, the protection of his presence to the widows and orphans of his dead brothers.

Thus, burdened and weary, oppressed by the listlessness of the season, the cholera descended upon Surendra at an unlucky moment. From the first glimmer of dawn, there were constant demands upon his skill. Professional keenness and the spur of excitement braced Surendra's flagging energies and steadied his shaken nerves. For the time, he was again the cool, level-headed, yet withal daring, practitioner of bygone, similar scenes. And he had need of all his strength and skill, of the absolute command of every faculty.

Weakened with fever, enervated by the long months of rain and steamy heat, the coolies fell ready victims to the pest. Cases cropped up outside the cooli lines: there were victims even in the babus' quarters. Surendra flew here and there, the sahibs of the various departments rendering him willing assistance. To the secret relief of Weston, Surendra proved himself abundantly equal to the emergency. His keen eye and unerring judgement seemed to divine the precise moment at which to administer the saving injection. With steady hand he administered the dose. One case after another, as the day wore on, yielded to treatment, the reports of fresh cases grew fewer, the number of deaths was insignificant.

At seven of the evening, Surendra, having bathed, changed his garments and taken a hasty meal brought to him in the babus' common room, was debating with himself the advisability of returning home for a rest before setting out on his night rounds. As the sharp spur of immediate danger was withdrawn, Surendra felt his suddenly quickened energies sink back into their former listless fatigue. An irresistible exhaustion crept over body and brain. He leaned back in his chair, and closed his eyes. Something moved upon his knees. Casting listless eyes in the direction of the fluttering touch, he saw that his hands, just now so steady and so sure, were trembling like the hands of an old man. If there should be fresh cases ! As the thought formed in his mind, there was a patter of running feet, and a voice called for the Doctor Babu. It was a message from the house of the Bara Sahib. The Sahib was down with cholera !

Mechanically, Surendra stumbled to his feet, and made to follow the messenger. Ram Lall, for the messenger was no other, suggested that it would be well to take with them the instrument, that with which the Doctor Babu saved lives. Surendra shook his head and stumbled forward. Ram Lall, fearful, yet determined, made his way to the dispensary alone, extracted from the compounder the requisite articles, and followed Surendra at a quick trot, arriving at the same moment as

Surendra, trembling and sobbing with shock and grief, stumbled into the presence of the Memsahib, who came forward to meet him in the verandah.

Beatrice had gone that morning to spend the day with Mrs. Hammond. Weston, only too glad to have her away from the possibility of danger, had told her nothing of the epidemic, and, in the bustle of her early departure, the servants had not mentioned it. It had been Weston's intention to send Ram Lall, towards evening, to arrange with Mrs. Hammond to keep his wife for the night, when he would, so he hoped, be able to send reassuring news.

But fate had decreed otherwise. Beatrice had returned, at half-past six, to find the Sahib on the point of collapse, the servants beside themselves with fear, the bearer telephoning wildly to Hammond's house, whence Mrs. Weston and Hammond had already set out, and Ram Lall abroad in search of the Doctor Babu. Ram Lall's task was not easy, he wandered in search of Surendra from point to point for fully half an hour before he came upon him in the babus' common room.

Hammond had gone tearing back to Milor Bagan to fetch Major Bates, the Civil Surgeon, but it was plain, even to Beatrice's inexperienced eyes, that her husband's fate would be decided before any help could be expected from the Civil Surgeon. For a second, hope died within

her, as Surendra, shaken with sobs, held out his trembling hands before her dismayed eyes.

“ You must ! You must ! ” she gasped.

“ I can’t ! ” moaned Surendra, “ I can’t.” He staggered back against the verandah wall, his head drooping upon his breast, his shaking hands hanging at his sides.

Beatrice’s figure stiffened to resolution. “ You can ! ” she said, advancing to Surendra as she spoke, and laying firm, cool hands upon his trembling shoulders. “ You can and you will ! ”

“ I can’t ! I can’t ! ” he muttered, but even as he spoke, something of the stiffening of the West passed from the tense body of the white woman into his racked nerves and shaking frame. His sobs ceased, he drew himself straight, but he shook his head as he held up his quivering hands.

Beatrice seized the shaking hands in her own and held them in a firm grasp, muttering, as she did do, a low order to Ram Lall who stood at her side.

“ You can and you will ! ” she said again in slow, tense accents.

Ram Lall stood at her side with a glass. Without a word, she motioned him to hand the glass to Surendra.

Surendra drank.

Beatrice waited.

Surendra stood upright, raised his hands and inspected them, they were steady and firm.

“You can and you will,” said Beatrice, her hands on his shoulders, her eyes sending a straight beam of courage and confidence into his.

“I can and I will,” he repeated, and followed her into the sick room.

Half an hour later, the hoot of a motor horn sounded down the jungle road. Hammond and the Civil Surgeon entered Weston’s room to find Beatrice kneeling by her husband’s side, her eyes glued to his face, her fingers upon his pulse. On the floor, at the other side of the bed, sunk in an unconscious heap, his fingers still upon his patient’s wrist, was Surendra. Bates strode forward, shook the dark fingers from the white wrist and bent anxiously over the patient.

“Thank God !” he said.

“He saved his life,” whispered Beatrice, at last taking her eyes from her husband’s face and nodding towards the inert form on the floor. With a gesture of disgust, the Civil Surgeon looked up from his examination of his fellow practitioner upon the floor.

“The fellow’s drunk,” he said.

At the Major’s remark, Hammond strode forward from his post in the doorway.

His eyes met Beatrice's upward gaze with a cynical smile, as, at a sign from Bates, he lent his assistance to carry Surendra from the room. Casting an anxious glance at the sleeping man on the bed, Beatrice followed them.

"He saved my husband's life," she repeated, as the men, with no very gentle hands, dropped the unconscious Surendra upon the verandah floor.

"By a fluke," said Bates.

"Drunk as a hog," said Hammond.

"It was necessary," said Beatrice.

"Good God, Mrs. Weston! What next?" muttered Hammond, as Bates vanished into the sick room.

A scream, and a patter of feet on the stairs, drowned Beatrice's reply.

There was a scuffling sound of struggle, an altercation of shrill abuse and gruff protestation, and Ram Lall came slowly backwards up the stairs, forced from step to step by a shrieking, struggling, feminine figure, which staggered and swayed under a heavy burden, until, under the light of the lamp at the head of the stairs, it resolved itself into Binodini, carrying the writhing form of Krishna. With fantastic strength, the slight form hurled itself against the sturdy figure of Ram Lall, pushed him aside, and laid the convulsed body of the child at

Beatrice's feet. As she did so, her eyes fell upon the prostrate form of Surendra. At the sight of her unconscious husband, every vestige of Binodini's customary, patient reserve vanished, and Beatrice beheld her, a shrieking virago. In a torrent of unintelligible vernacular, the loosened hair streaming out from her unveiled head, her naked arms raised aloft, she called down curses upon the meddling sahib-folk, who had, for their own ends, in one day bereft her of husband and son. Lo ! by the hand of her husband had many lives been saved. Yet, when the sickness entered into his own house, there only could he not give his aid. His help was for strangers, for foreigners, nay, they had killed him, these people ! And now, for want of his father's skill, his son must die also ! Hai ! Hai ! Why had she not heard the words of her people ? From the first had not these folk brought ill-fortune to her and to her house, she had been a happy wife and mother. Then these folk had come into her life ! Behold her a widow and childless ! A curse upon these sahib-folk ! A curse ! A curse !

Her shrill imprecations were choked by the vigorous hands of the Memsahib's ayah, who came flying down the verandah, and flinging a blanket over Binodini's convulsed features, with Ram Lall's willing aid, bore the struggling, choking form down the stairs, as the angry face of the Civil Surgeon appeared in the doorway.

"If you permit disturbances like this, Mrs. Weston" he began, "Hullo. What is this ?" and he bent over Krishna.

"Save him ! Save him !" implored Beatrice. "His father saved my husband."

"Go to the Sahib," returned Bates shortly, medical instinct claiming his skill for the greater need. "Call me at the slightest change. What's this ?" he muttered as Ram Lall came to his side. "Oh good !" as the chaprassi silently proffered the apparatus he had brought for Surendra.

"God help us ! The child's a skeleton !" he muttered as he rolled back the shirt-sleeve from the wasted arm.

"Here ! Hold this child," he said, jerking an imperious gesture towards Hammond as Krishna writhed and twisted under his hands.

The first flush of dawn showed the verandah empty, save for the still sleeping Surendra. In the drawing-room, Krishna, warmly covered, slept upon a mattress. Stretched on a couple of couches, the Civil Surgeon and his coadjutor, Hammond, took a needed rest. In the inner room, her head sunk upon his pillow, her fingers still upon his pulse, Beatrice slept by her sleeping husband.

Surendra stirred in his sleep, shivered in the chilly morning air, and sat up. Like a dark flood, the memories of the previous night swept over his soul. He bowed his head in despair. He

had failed the Sahib in his hour of need. The Sahib had had faith in him, had stood by him, and to what end ?

His faith was betrayed, his loyalty had cost him his life. The Sahib was dead. There was but one thing possible. As surely as though he had plunged a knife into his breast, he had slain this man who had trusted him. Let his own worthless life pay the price. Let him make an end of a life of blunders and follies. Perchance, in another birth, he might be given means to atone.

Surendra stumbled down the stairs, and rushed forward to the river.

The sky was pink with dawn as he stood upon the jetty. At his feet, the rolling brown flood of the river swept past to the sea. Surendra stepped forward. A hand was laid on his arm. "Brother," said a low voice in his ear. It was Romesh's friend of the ferry steamer.

"Let be," muttered Surendra, striving to shake off the hand.

"In the hour of deliverance, why despair ?" said the stranger.

"How shall he not despair who has lost his honour and slain his friend ?" returned Surendra, still struggling in the strong grasp of the stranger and straining towards the river.

"What mad talk is this ? Thou hast not slain, but saved !"

“The Sahib is dead,” said Surendra, ceasing his struggles, and turning to look the stranger in the eyes.

“The Sahib is *not* dead,” returned the other.

“Brother !” said the stranger again.

“Brother !” cried Surendra, clasping the other’s shoulders.

“Come !” said his brother, taking Surendra’s arm. “See,” he added, pointing to the sun, now rising a blazing ball from a bed of ruddy clouds. “See ! the sun rises upon a new day. For thee, also, the night with its cares and its sorrows is gone. Come, brother, together we begin this new day.”

CHAPTER XV.

“To your Honour greeting. Let the Sahib also accept our heartfelt devotion. Hearing that your Honour stayed in Agra, to that place I sent this letter. The air of that place is good, therein may the health of the Sahib be restored, as also the health of your Honour. Forasmuch as it was your Honour’s desire that I should make known unto you and to the Sahib also, the manner of my father’s departure from the house of my brother, for that reason, I wrote this letter. For my news, let the Memsahib implore the pardon of the Sahib.

“Touching the order of the Sahib, in respect of the house of the Doctor Babu, to the utmost of my power, with arguments, with entreaties, nay, even with threatenings of the wrath of the Sahib, have I implored my father to leave that place, and in my company to depart to Bombay. Yet, by many devices has my father prevented me, and remained. At the time of my first proposal for his going, concerning the length of the journey, and by reason of his age and infirmities, my father made his objections.

“Thus and thus spake my father. Behold, he was old and infirm. The difficulties of the

journey were many. How should he go afoot? How should there be an obtaining of horses, of carriages? How should he arrive at the place of the trains? Then, with much care and at the cost of much effort, did I make bandobasts for horses, for carriages, as also for food and for water by the road. And when all was prepared, when all were ready, even at the very point of setting out, then suddenly, yet again, my father made objections and went not. Behold, for him the bandobast was sufficient, he was a man of knowledge, with him was little respect of caste or of custom, but for my mother it was not so. She was a woman of much belief, very careful was she for her caste. From the time that she should leave the house of her son, even of Surendra, until the time that she should stand in her son's house, even my house, in Bombay, so long would she neither taste food nor drink water. Behold, she also was old and infirm, to-day the fever was upon her. Would my brother turn his sick mother fasting, from his door, to die by the road?

“Thus it came to pass that, with trouble and with haste, did I send the horses and the carriages from the door, and my schemes were brought to nought, and my hopes were made dust.

“Yet, when after a few days, the fever of my mother grew less, then did I, taking courage yet again, set about making afresh the arrangements for my father's departure. Then, my

father, perceiving my intentions, made objections and would dissuade me.

“Then did Surendra, my brother, himself make mention of his duty to the Sahib, further, he spake of the orders and the displeasure of the Sahib. But my father made anger and heard not. He spake of the evil customs of these days, how that there was no devotion of sons towards parents, how that, for him, in his sickness and his old age, there was no place under the roof of his son. His son, my brother Surendra, desired the departure of his aged father ; good, he would go. If he should die by the road, yet again, good, he would die. These were days of strange deeds. He was the father of many sons, of him were daughters-in-law and of grandchildren not a few ; yet, that he should die untended by the road, if such was the will of his son, so let it be.

“As for me, what could I do, or how could I withstand my father ? Behold, he spake truth. He is old and infirm, the days remaining to him are few. How can I, his son, compel him to set forth upon so long a journey, or how can my brother Surendra drive from his door his father, aged and infirm, his mother, feeble and sick ? Moreover, my father speaks truth. His time grows short, his stay will not be for long. Let the Memsahib show favour, and, having pity upon our perplexities, forgive. Behold, the distress of my brother is great.

That he should again and again bring to nought the orders of the Sahib, that is his evil fate.

“Touching the proposal of the Sahib that my father and his house should take up their lodging in the aforetime abode of my uncle in the jungle, my father was consenting to the arrangement. Then, seeing that he was in the mind to consent, my mother, together with her daughters-in-law, lifted up their voices and with many words and much crying aloud, made objection and lamentation. That to which the womenkind of a household make objection, how shall it be accomplished ?

“Then, I, being unable to remain longer, came to Bombay. And by force did I cause to come with me, my youngest brother, together with the widow of my eldest brother and her children ; the children of my other brother I brought with me also, and great was their lamentation, yet I heard not. Thus, even though the orders of the Sahib are not accomplished in full, yet the dwellers in the house of my brother are become few, and he has, in some measure, peace. Let the Memsahib show favour and pardon. According to my power, even so have I performed. Touching the tarrying of my father, it will not be for long.

“Concerning Romesh, that maker of mischief, he will make no further trouble. Have I not made clear to him my mind, as the mind of the Sahib also. Yet again be it known, for but a

short space shall my father give annoyance. Let the Sahib show mercy and pardon.

“Your faithful one,

“RAJENDRA NATH RAI.”

“DEAR LADY,

“For that the orders of the Sahib have been accomplished but in part, let the Memsahib show favour and pardon. Behold, at the cost of much trouble has my brother made many bandobasts. Further, in this house, concerning these matters, has the talk been continual, the disagreements not a few. Thrice has his going been prepared, and thrice has my father, at the moment of setting forth, suddenly made objection and remained. Last of all, his time and his patience being at an end, my brother, taking with him my youngest brother, together with the widow of my eldest brother and her children, as also the children of my sister-in-law, she who remains in my house, in the company of these, my brother has left this place and has gone to Bombay.

“Then, these being gone, at such a time as we had speech together, my father made known to me his mind, and the thoughts of his inmost heart. Touching the matter of his going, lo, without doubt, these be his last days. Had he hope of even so much as two years of life, then would he go to Bombay. But he was an old man, and sick. He was in a good place. At no time and in no other place, could there, be

for him so excellent an opportunity for death as in this house, on the banks of Ganga. All the years of his youth, had he lived without belief. Now, in the time of his old age, he sought after the gods. Here, on the banks of the holy stream, he would end his days, and, dying, mingle his ashes with the sacred waters. Thus spake my father. Further, he charged me to make known to the Sahib his heartfelt thanks for the many and manifold favours of the Sahib to him and to his house. Lying upon his sick bed, from the window of the house of his son, he has seen how the Sahib goes to and fro amongst the people, careful for the needs of the poor. He has talked with the Memsahib and seen her favour to the children. Let the Sahib receive a just reward of his deeds. Let the gods make the Sahib immortal, let his days be long, and his happiness accomplished. Touching my father's dwelling in the house of his son, it will not be for long.

“ Thus have I striven to show to the Memsahib the mind of my father and the difficulties in respect of the orders of the Sahib. Let the Memsahib show favour and pardon. Moreover, it will not be for long.

“ Your faithful one,

“ SURENDRA NATH RAI. ”

“ BELOVED MOTHER,

“ Receiving your letter of kindness, thus was I glad beyond words. Yet, forasmuch as I longed

for the sight of the Memsahib, that sight coming not speedily, for that reason, I grieve and am sad. Come quickly, my friend, come quickly. From your own lips, would I hear the words of forgiveness. Touching that night of madness, let the Memsahib think upon it no more. Let the Memsahib, showing kindness, forgive. Your Honour's dear child, my son Krishna, is well, yet, since the Memsahib comes not to our house, we are sad ; moreover, there is no going forth, nor eating of air in the garden of the Memsahib. Let the Memsahib come quickly. My father-in-law sends greeting. He is sick. He has not gone to Bombay. Yet it is his wish that I make known to the Memsahib that his days in this place will be few. For that he remains still in the house of his son, let the Sahib, showing favour, pardon. It will not be for long.

“ Your Honour's dear daughter,

“ BINODINI LATA RAI. ”

Beatrice dropped her letters in her lap and drew her wraps more closely round her. The keen morning air of an Agra November blew fresh and cool into the upper verandah of the hotel. The garden below was a blaze of blossoms. Morning glories hung their blue draperies about the tall, slender trunks of the coconut palms, and piled themselves, in blue masses, over walls and arches. Asters and stocks wove a pale background for arabesques of red poppies

and sweet-scented roses. Beyond the garden, a long, white ribbon of dusty road ran out over the shimmering plain to the distant horizon. A noisy chorus of birds shrilled from tree to tree. Many tones below the tuneless falsetto of the birds, came the rasping creak of the rope of a primitive well, whose low, brown hummock rose above the garden wall. Up the hummock, toiled the patient oxen, the motive power of the creaking pulley. Creak, creak, up they came ; creak, creak, down again. Beatrice, dreamily watching, was minded of the military worthy

“ Who had a thousand men.

He marched his soldiers up the hill,
And he marched them down again.”

Under the blue of the sky, in the hot sunshine, the garden seemed even garishly gay. Beatrice shaded her eyes with her hand, and turned her chair towards the grateful shade of the verandah, smiling to herself, as the jingling words of the absurd rhyme fitted themselves to the pompous pace of the oxen. Laughter came readily, she was rested and refreshed. It was a month since that night of stress, when death had twice been driven from the house by the river. Three weeks, in this bracing air, had restored Weston's strength and brought to Beatrice fresh courage. She had come to Agra, crushed between the sorrows of two worlds,

weary to her soul, oppressed with a sick disgust of the country and all that pertained to it, above all of her own small part therein. Love seemed cold, faith dead. Yet, with rest and distance, love awoke to warm, new life ; faith rose up, ready for new risks. The bundle of letters, with their tale of petty problems and irritating difficulties, raised smiles rather than sighs, for the sum of the message was not failure. Beatrice drew herself straight in her chair. She was loved, she was needed, there was a call for fresh effort, and she was ready.

Quick steps sounded smartly on the stone stairs, and Weston entered the verandah.

"Quite a mail!" he cried at the sight of the letters. "Oh bother!" as his eye fell upon the crabbed hieroglyphics. "Well, I can't wade through that. Read them, dear."

Beatrice read.

"Hm! Hm!" said the Sahib. "So my orders have not been carried out."

"But, as he says, what can he do?" said Beatrice, turning the letters over in her fingers. "The more one understands of the difficulties of these people. . . ."

"I'm half inclined to wish I'd never discovered how they looked at things," said the Sahib meditatively.

"No, you're not," said Beatrice.

“ No, you’re right,” agreed Weston, “ I’m not. But, by Jove ! Half the time, it only means that you see a hopeless tangle which you are powerless to unravel.”

“ A greater than ourselves will unravel this one,” said Beatrice, turning to her letters. “ It will not be for long,” she read again.

“ Aye,” said the Sahib. “ In this case, we have the long lost brother arriving in the nick of time, and it may be that, as you say, Surendra’s old man of the sea will obligingly depart in the odour of sanctity before my official patience is compelled to give out. But, my dear, there are hundreds of these cases.”

“ But for us, at present, only one,” said Beatrice.

The Sahib laughed. “ Well, that’s the only way to tackle these problems, I grant,” he said. “ And now, my dear, what do you say to yet another jaunt to Fatehpur ? ”

“ Famous ! ” said Beatrice.

“ Achcha ! We start in half an hour.”

The deserted city had a never-ending attraction for the Westons. They knew it well, too well to need the hampering assistance of the guide. They were looking for fresh prints of leopard pads in the dry dust of the ruined stables, and Weston was debating the possibility of spending a night in the ruins, on the chance of getting a skin, when they heard hurried,

trotting footsteps coming towards them, and a tall, black figure appeared at the end of the long, dim passage.

“Why! It’s Padre Bennett!” exclaimed Beatrice.

“So it is!” said Weston. “Hullo Bennett! What on earth are you doing here?”

“I’m looking for . . .”

“For a wife!” cried Weston, finishing the old formula in the old fashion. “Why! We heard you had found her! Married her!”

“I’m looking for *my* wife,” explained the padre. “I left her in the house of Mariam, she was - er”

“Arguing,” suggested Weston.

“She was,” sighed the padre. “She was scolding the guide about Akbar’s Christian wife.”

“Scolding the guide!” said Weston. “Surely the fellow’s too young to have had a hand in Akbar’s matrimonial complications.”

“Mrs. Bennett objects to the whole story,” said the padre nervously, as he hustled his friends across courtyards and through palaces in the course of his search.

“Objects?” asked Beatrice.

“She must be still in the house of Mariam,” said the padre, striding forward in the direction of that edifice. “My dear wife has a very nice

sense of propriety," he added in answer to Beatrice's question. "She - er . . . she doesn't approve of mixed marriages." As he spoke, they mounted the steep steps of the terrace of Mariam's house, and the shrill, high notes of determined altercation fell upon their ears.

"I tell you, it is impossible to persuade me that any English woman ever married Akbar!"

"Akbar's wife Christian lady, yet *not* English lady," came the soft answer of the guide, whose smiling countenance and conciliating gestures now came into view.

"It's the same thing," snapped the lady, who now rose upon their vision, a miracle of modish smartness and righteous indignation.

"*Not* the same thing," smiled the guide with an apologetic wriggle.

"Don't tell me," snapped Mrs. Bennett, emphasizing her remarks with a series of vicious taps of her sunshade upon the terrace. "Don't tell me that Akbar married an American. I'm just as ready to believe that he ran into Agra by train."

"Akbar's wife *not* American," agreed the smiling champion of Moghul tradition.

"Nor yet an English woman," snapped Mrs. Bennett.

"Neither was she English lady," said the guide.

"Then there are no Christians left, unless we are going to quibble about Scotch and Irish," said Mrs. Bennett decisively.

"Many other Christian makes," said the guide softly. "Some telling, Portuguese lady. Some telling, Armenian lady."

"Oh! That sort of person!" said Mrs. Bennett. "Roman Catholic cook sort of class."

"*Not* a cook's caste!" said the guide, lifting shocked, expostulating hands.

"Now, understand me, young man!" said Mrs. Bennett firmly. "Don't try to impose that absurd story of a Christian wife on respectable English women. And don't suppose that you improve matters by pretending to see the remains of Popish symbols painted on the walls." Mrs. Bennett concluded her peroration with a smart tap of her sunshade on the mottled wall, upon which the guide had invited her to discern, in sundry scratches, the outlines of the wings of the angelic messenger, in a vanished painting of the Annunciation.

As she turned to welcome her husband, that gentleman took advantage of his wife's greetings to the Westons, including the congratulations on Weston's recovery, which the worthy padre had entirely forgotten, to administer a propitiatory tip to the guide.

“Highly incomprehensible females,” said that worthy, sympathetically, as he pocketed the rupees. “Other ladies working hard to excavate Christian wife for Akbar. This so dissolute lady not permitting smallest marriageable possibilities to Akbar. Achcha! For Akbar no more troubles!” he shot a look of commiseration at the padre and left them.

Over tiffin, in the big, shady rest-house, the Westons heard the plans of the happy pair.

“We hope to lead a life of effort together,” said the padre.

“I have just received the gift of a living,” snapped his wife.

“Where? At Home?” asked Beatrice.

“Certainly,” returned the bride shortly. “I wrote to my uncle, the patron of this living, six months ago that is, directly I was married.”

“Oh!” said Beatrice, sending a quick smile in her husband’s direction.

“It is in the country, quite a decent living. A good vicarage, a large garden,” said the bride.

“We have no intention of losing touch with our Indian interests,” said the padre. “The vicarage will make an admirable hostel for Indian students.”

“For Indian students?” asked Beatrice, puzzled.

“ During vacations,” explained the padre. “ I might coach Bengali boys, too. I am not sure but I might indulge in a few adoptions.”

“ Oh ! ” said Beatrice, looking doubtfully at the stony face of Mrs. Bennett.

“ A vicar has sufficient duties in his parish,” snapped that lady.

“ And do you still study the vernaculars, Mrs. Bennett ? ” asked Weston mischievously.

But at that moment, Mrs. Bennett, turning sharply upon an offending khidmatgar, administered a smart reproof, whose plain English gave a sufficient negative to Weston’s question.

“ Those two have simply snuffed each other out,” was Weston’s comment, as they drove back to Agra.

“ No more Bengali services,” laughed Beatrice.

“ Or Zanana Missions,” chuckled Weston.

“ Or hot scorches on my poor bicycle,” added Beatrice.

“ And isn’t she smart ? ” whistled Weston.

“ Well, the padre’s found his wife,” said Beatrice.

“ Rather say he’s caught a Tartar,” said Weston.

CHAPTER XIV.

“DEAR BEATRICE,

“So the first act of the Great Adventure concludes in true fairy tale fashion. Even though I knew the glad end of the story, I confess to holding my breath at certain stages of your letter. I cannot write of the scenes of the Sahib's illness, they are matters beyond speech or discussion, subjects for a mute, wondering thanksgiving. From the climax of that evening, the events of your story march rapidly to a happy ending. The rich brother arrives in the nick of time, led, oh humorous fate ! by the villain of the piece, Romesh. Deliverance reaches Surendra at the climax of his despair. As he bends over the river, ready to set forth on the greatest adventure of all, his brother steps forward with news of the Sahib's safety and the good fortune of Surendra's family. All is in train for the realization of Surendra's dream of a separate ménage, a quiet existence with wife and child, when the old sceptic intervenes with his pious determination to draw his last breath on the banks of Ganga, whereupon you all revert to something very like the original situation.

“The Memsahib recruiting in Agra is bombarded from the Bengali side of her sympathies with a bundle of letters from the factory, on the other hand, she is conscious of having assisted the Sahib to the unwelcome knowledge of an irritating situation. The Sahib is pricked by his official conscience, and torn between stern duty and his genuine anxiety to lend a helping hand to the puzzled Surendra. Surendra occupies his usual hot corner, between the tigers of the shore and the crocodiles of the stream. You return to the factory, prepared for further calls on your patience and further perplexities for your ingenuity.

“You arrive after dark, and lo, as you turn in at your gate, the solution of the last knot in the problem advances to meet you. The lights of the car fall upon the shrouded shapes carried high on a couple of charpoys. The old sceptic, and the faithful devotee, his wife, are carried out to die on the banks of the Ganges. You wonder and wait. Not until the sunset of the following day, does the smoke soar heavenwards from the little burning ghât on the river bank.

“Dear, let your thoughts and your prayers soar up with the smoke; leave the rest to the God Who alone can read the hearts of Christians and Hindus. As you suggest, it does seem rather a straining of appropriate coincidence that the old folks should die together and consume side by side. One cannot

think that Surendra But certainly the old mother would have infinitely preferred a handful of mother earth over her mouth, or an injudicious immersion in the Ganges, and a place upon the pyre at the side of her lord, to an ignominious return to a widowed life. She is gone. She leaves behind a record, which we white women might well take as example : a record of lifelong service and unswerving love, a faith which never failed, which believed all things, hoped all things, until, in death, hope was realized, and she and her husband passed together, in one faith, to the God Who takes no count of creeds or dogmas, Who measures in depths of love, in heights of sacrifice.

“ Since our God is love, since He has given us, once for all, a picture of a perfect life, a life of sacrifice, of obedience unto death, since the saving of a soul from death shall cover a multitude of sins, then, how precious must be the life and the death of that Hindu mother in the sight of God. Oh, Beatrice ! when I contemplate the power of love, the spirit of sacrifice of good Hindu women, I am bowed in penitence for my feebleness of duty. So much less than these others have I deserved, and so much more has God given me.

“ And now, you sit again in the purdah garden. To visit it is become an accepted custom. The palki trots to and fro to bring the eager guests. Binodini, the wife of Bihari, and oh, triumph of perseverance ! the wife of Romesh, I know

them all. I hear their soft chatter and shrill laughter. I hear the merry shouts of the children as they romp through their games.

“ And Surendra’s dream has come true. He leads a peaceful life with his wife and child, trusted by the Sahib, happy with books and scribbling. Good news comes from the family in Bombay. Yet with it all, you cry out that as yet you have done nothing. Well, dear, your ‘as yet’ tells its own tale. There is no profit in a balancing of one’s successes and failures, a counting of sins and virtues. Your greatest deed is, that you have set in motion a tide of love between East and West. You have swept away, on that warm stream, the barrier which divided you from your neighbours. You took the big risk of a fine faith, you met perils proportionate to the risk you ran. You were almost vanquished, but, thank God, you held on. You believed all things, you hoped all things. And now, prepare for fresh difficulties, new problems, further risks, and when they come, hope on, trust on, persevere, for, as you say, you have only begun.

“ Yours affectionately,

“ ALICE LANCASTER.”

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